Commentary
July 1998

Now May We Please Defend Ourselves?

Robert Kagan & Gary Schmitt

Southern Comforts
Midge Decter

The Contradictions of A. J. Heschel
Jon D. Levenson

Is Labor Back?
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A Story
Joseph Epstein

The Gingrich Manifesto
John O'Sullivan

Beijing 1947
Michael Loewe

Two Fallen Stars
Terry Teachout

Books in Review
Gabriel Schoenfeld • David Singer • Daniel Casse
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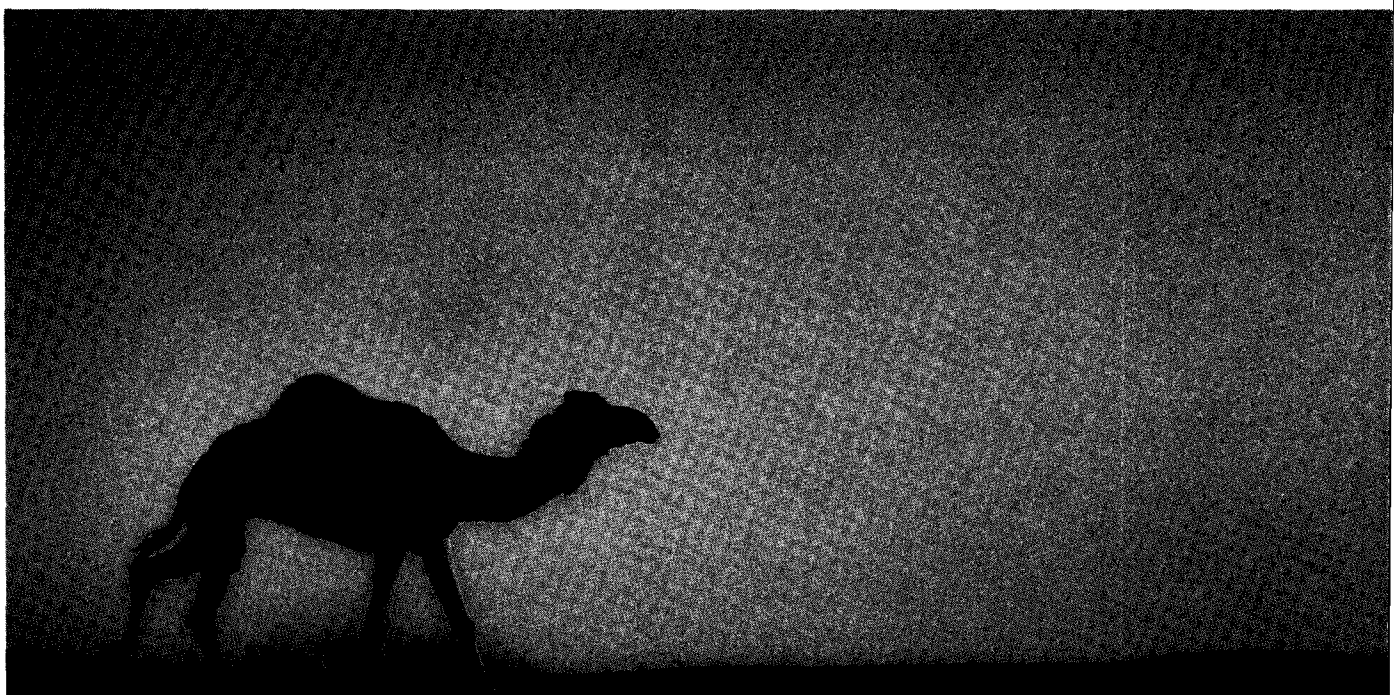

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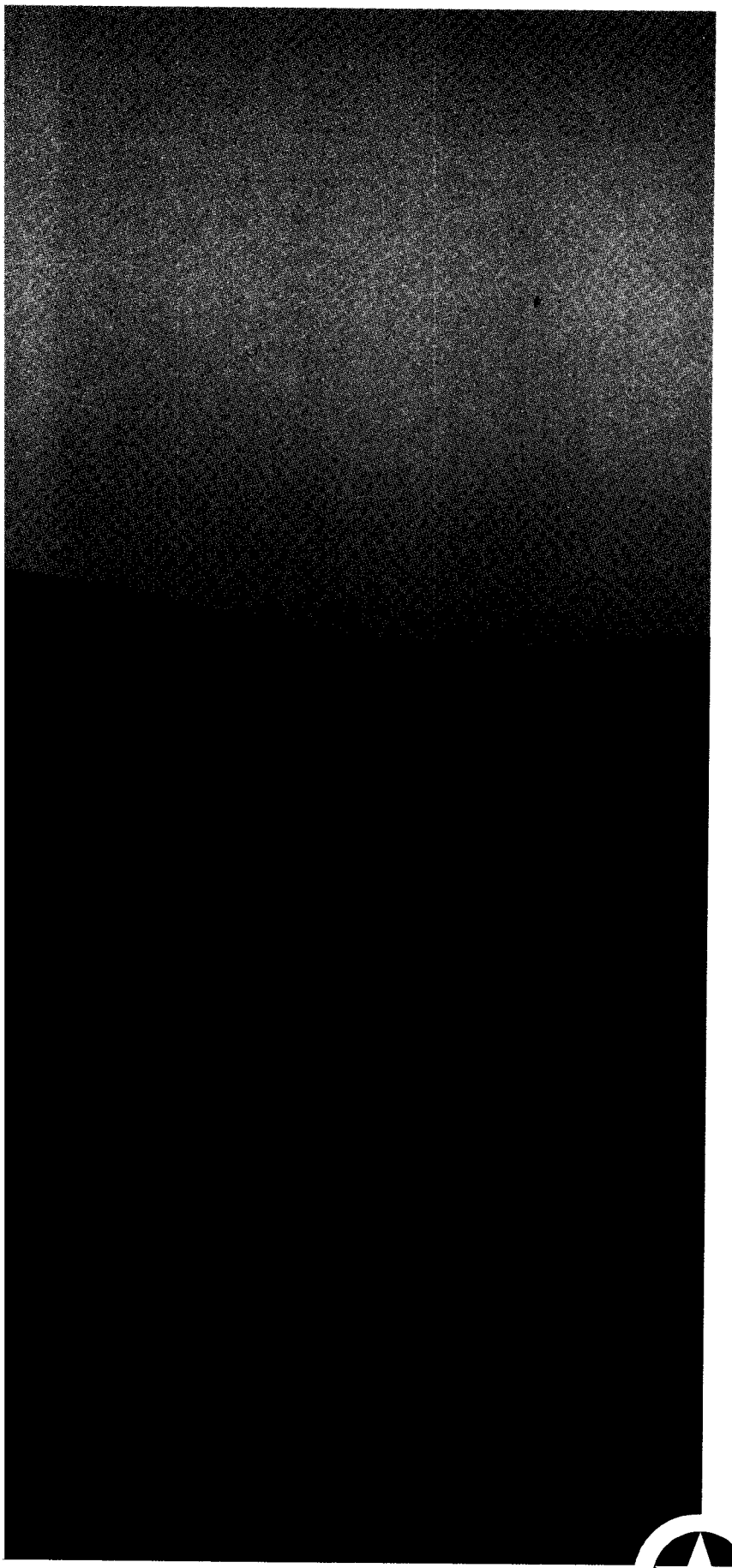

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Commentary
July 1998

Letters from Readers

The Death Penalty

To the Editor:

In "What Do Murderers Deserve?" [April], David Gelernter conveniently ignores the inconvenient question: what if we are wrong? What if we kill an innocent man or woman? And what if at least some of us do so knowingly?

While most conservative proponents of the death penalty would not trust the government to fill a hole in a road that passes in front of their homes, and while they decry the power of the Internal Revenue Service to ruin the poor independent businessman, they nevertheless feel somehow that our system of justice, the very system that freed O.J. Simpson, is incapable of error. Which is, of course, absurd, both spiritually and practically, since the justice system is composed of fallible individuals, men and women, flawed and lacking in perfect knowledge. This leaves us with a numbers game; better to kill a few innocent folks and send the right message than let even one guilty man or woman go without final punishment.

But the numbers game is, flatly, beside the point. Those who base their defense of the death penalty on the unassailable ground of idealism should recognize that if we as a culture murder even one innocent man or woman, and if we admit to even the slightest risk of error, then we knowingly admit to murder—and we fail.

J. Christopher Holobar
State College, Pennsylvania

To the Editor:

David Gelernter fails to address one very troubling argument against capital punishment—the fact that innocent men are wrongly convicted and sentenced to death.

From 1973 to 1993, at least 48 persons on death row in the United States had their convictions overturned, were exonerated, and were freed outright. From 1993 through mid-1997, an additional 21 persons on death row were exonerated and released. This amounts to 69 exonerations, nearly three per year over 24 years. These 69 unfortunate persons, some of them imprisoned for nearly twenty years, were not freed because of legal technicalities. In at least nine of the most recently documented 21 cases alone, the defendant not only did not commit the crime but was convicted because of prosecutorial misconduct. The reasons for the other acquittals included the use of DNA evidence that excluded the "guilty" person to a scientific certainty or incompetent defense counsel who failed to uncover obvious proof of his client's innocence.

There are many reasons why our application of the death penalty is capricious and unfair. Among them is the fact that the U.S. has 50 states with 50 different sets of laws that are enforced by thousands of individual prosecutors, many with petty political ambitions or a hunger for publicity. Some trials are conducted before judges who must face reelection aware that it is political suicide to appear "soft on crime." Finally, it is a fact that racial prejudice permeates our criminal-justice system. African-Americans who murder white victims are legion on death row but it is virtually impossible to find a white or African-American sentenced to death in a case where the victim was African-American.

Mr. Gelernter writes about the "moral certainty" he feels we lack in the U.S. It is well-documented that the U.S. stands virtually alone among the civilized countries of the world in retaining the death penalty. Further, the U.S. leads the world in executions of persons who were under eighteen years old at the time they committed the offense. In this category we lead such enlightened countries

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as Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen—the only other nations in the world that legally execute juvenile offenders.

So, how many "good" executions does it take to balance the mistaken execution of one innocent person? I would be interested in Mr. Gelernter's response.

MICHAEL MCNEW
New Britain, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR:

David Gelernter lends weight to his arguments by locating opposition to the death penalty in an elitist, morally uncertain intelligentsia. In this tactic, a package of leftist stances likely to be unpopular with many COMMENTARY readers (including this one)—most importantly, an inability to call evil by its name—is cited as evidence of an out-of-touch elite unable to seek real justice in the form of the death penalty.

But sometimes the intelligentsia can be right, even if for the wrong reasons. I would suggest that the death penalty is better grouped with a different set of policies, ones that indicate a dangerous erosion in our society's sense of the sanctity of life. In what Pope John Paul II has called an emerging "culture of death," the death penalty, abortion on demand, and euthanasia represent quick but brutal solutions to complex imperfections in our social and human life. These are each tempting in their respective contexts, but all represent creeping desensitization in how our society views human life.

Mr. Gelernter skims the sanctity-of-life issue in citing the Talmud's acceptance in principle of this ultimate penalty, while ignoring the fact that the Talmud's position includes procedural limitations that make such punishment virtually unimposable in practice.

As a community obligated to fashion a moral response, we should indeed call evil by its name, demand justice, and discard today's popular, therapeutic, guilt-denying explanations of criminal behavior. This can be done, however, without piling death on death.

DANIEL WEINER
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

I am very sympathetic to David Gelernter's argument, especially to his recognition that moral absolutes do in fact exist. But where his argument becomes problematic (for me, anyway) lies in the absoluteness of the death penalty and in the source of life itself. Life is a gift of God. The absolute evil Mr. Gelernter proclaims (and with which I agree) is due to this authorship. Murder is an offense not only against the deceased victim and society but against God Himself. It would seem, therefore, that the imperative should be "He who giveth, taketh away." Society did not give life; if death is to be the penalty, then it must be from God.

The problem I have is that taking life is by definition an absolute act. No amount of redeeming or exculpatory evidence can undo the execution of an innocent person. Nor does it allow for true repentance, as Mr. Gelernter himself points out in connection with the case of Karla Faye Tucker in Texas.

JAMES G. DERN
Morganton, North Carolina

TO THE EDITOR:

That David Gelernter would take intellectuals to task for not sending Theodore Kaczynski to the electric chair suggests that his own brush with death has altered his objectivity. By all accounts, Kaczynski is most likely a paranoid schizophrenic whose deranged brain chemistry has robbed him of his free will and rendered him a tortured soul. He is no more to blame than a driver who mows down pedestrians during an epileptic seizure. The observation that the planning and execution of his "strategy" occurred over decades and that he has repeatedly maintained that he is sane

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are in no way "compelling proof" of his mental competence.

JOEL N. EISEN, M.D.
Department of Psychiatry
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario
Canada

TO THE EDITOR:

The only punishment that approaches the cold-blooded taking of an innocent human being is the killer's loss of life. As a supporter of the death penalty, I believe that the main argument in support of the death sentence is pure, simple—yet not simplistic—*justice*.

I am puzzled by Mr. Gelernter's statement that he would consider himself "morally obligated to think long and hard before executing a penitent." Why? As Dennis Prager, whom Mr. Gelernter quotes, has recently written, this is insulting to the victim. I would like to add that penitence is absolutely irrelevant. The victim is dead, the evil committed, and the heinousness of the crime remains unchanged, apology or no apology.

As Mr. Gelernter maintains, society needs to proclaim that "murder is intolerable." If we really mean intolerable, then let us not tolerate it. Period. Let us not accept or consider repentance. Let God forgive the repenting murderers. To paraphrase Mr. Gelernter, America simply cannot afford to do so.

ISSY CHEKSES
Macon, Georgia

TO THE EDITOR:

David Gelernter has written a brilliant essay about the widening gap between court decisions and what most people would consider just. My explanation for this state of affairs is a little different from Mr. Gelernter's. It seems to me there is The Law and there is law. The nation is now in deepening trouble due to the fast-widening gap between the two. The Law was inscribed on the tablets Moses brought off the mountain, while law consists of man-made rules and their interpretation in courts.

It is a puzzlement how we can begin closing the growing gap between the two. No leadership comes from the legal profession. That leaves the rest of us to espouse homemade remedies. A couple of mine are to bar all attorneys from sharing awards with clients and to take a hard look at what law schools teach.

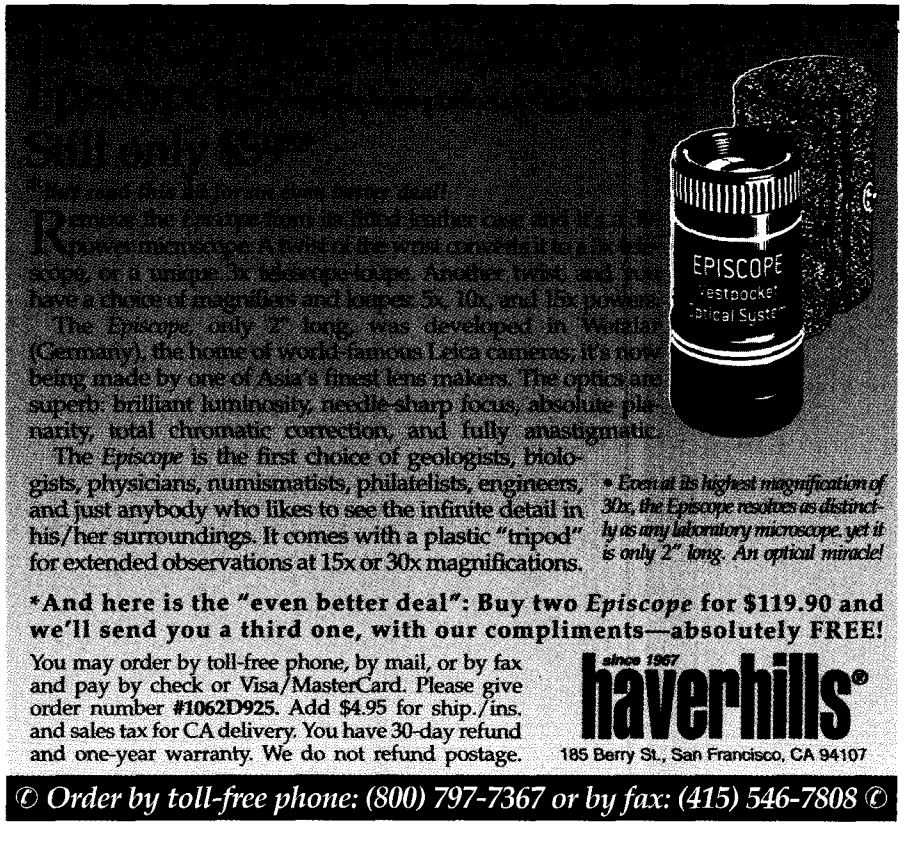
R.R. RICHARDSON
Amagansett, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

So much of the endless debate about capital punishment is, on both sides, shallow and repetitive that I was gratified to read David Gelernter's lucid article. I was also delighted that Mr. Gelernter relies on the social philosopher Robert Nisbet, much underappreciated during his career and now all but forgotten. Here is the quotation from Nisbet that Mr. Gelernter cites:

> Until a catharsis has been effected through trial, through the finding of guilt and then punishment, the community is anxious, fearful, apprehensive, and above all, contaminated.

If Nisbet were still alive, I think he might have written COMMENTARY to point out that his argument derived in large part from the French sociologist Emile Durkheim. Through his several books and more pointedly in an article on the function of punishment (never translated, so far as I know), Durkheim enunciated one of his principal themes: the moral underpinning of a society does not endure on its own. It requires continual replenishment from various social rituals, and, of these, the most influential is that the proportionate punishment of criminals tells us again that crimes are evil to varying degrees. Capital punishment deters potential murderers not in the simplistic sense of making them consider what might happen to them if they kill someone, but by bolstering



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the moral structure of the human community.

Thank you for an excellent statement of this thesis.

WILLIAM PETERSEN
Carmel, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to express my respect for and admiration of David Gelernter. In his article, he analyzes the issue of the death penalty completely and logically. This must have been a difficult task for Mr. Gelernter, who knows the terror of an attempted murder and the searing pain of surviving, recovering, and overcoming.

WILL ANDERSON
Finegayan, Guam

TO THE EDITOR:

David Gelernter's article is the most profound treatise on the subject of capital punishment I have ever read. Mr. Gelernter has said in no uncertain terms that society has an obligation to itself to punish the murder by executing the murderer. In our lives there is but one obligation we owe society and that is to protect us from ourselves. We should thank Mr. Gelernter for giving a voice to those who cannot speak, for giving vision to those who cannot see.

STEVEN E. POORTE
Farmington, Utah

DAVID GELERNTER writes:

The main objection to my piece has to do with the risk of executing innocent persons by accident. It is an important and serious objection, yet in this context it has an air of willed unreality—of deliberate refusal to grapple with inconvenient facts. For concreteness I focused in my piece on the cases of Karla Faye Tucker and Theodore Kaczynski. The facts in these cases are not in dispute; no serious person doubts that they were both guilty of murder. Consider also the case of O.J. Simpson, since J. Christopher Holobar brings it up; no serious person doubts that Simpson dismembered two human beings in cold blood. Enter Mr. Holobar with the observation that there *are* cases in which the wrong man was convicted; but what does this have to do with Simpson? Nothing whatsoever.

When I say that Tucker and Kaczynski and Simpson are known to be murderers, I don't mean known to me, I mean known also to Mr. Holobar, Michael McNew, Daniel Weiner, and every other serious person. Such knowledge carries responsibility. We cannot evade it by changing the subject.

This category of obvious cases is real and important. Of course there are other cases in which we have no confession or irrefutable physical evidence to go on, and in such cases we have accepted the responsibility to search relentlessly for the truth. In recent decades we have devised fantastically intricate legal safeguards to guarantee that we err on the side of caution. Mr. McNew notes that we have exonerated (in one way or another) 69 death-row prisoners since 1973, and that is exactly the point: we are fanatic in searching for errors.

Could we be even more fanatic? If we could, fine. I am in favor of every rational precaution in death-penalty cases. Mr. Holobar's suggestion that I believe it is "better to kill a few innocent folks" than to "let even one guilty man or woman go without final punishment" is false and offensive. I am happy to let off the probably-guilty to spare the possibly-innocent. But I am unwilling to let off the definitely guilty.

I would guess that, as matters stand, you are less likely to be executed for a murder you did not commit than to be knocked over by a meteorite. But no human society can zero out altogether the risk of violent death to innocent people. You might argue that we could zero out *this* small risk (at least) simply by abolishing executions, and it would be lovely to be able to accept such an argument; we would all feel better and sleep easier. The problem is, we have no right to make a judgment of this kind in a moral vacuum.

We are in the habit nowadays of looking only at the part of the picture that pleases us, the pretty part. Affirmative action is a classic example: it would be nice if we could discriminate in favor of certain people without automatically discriminating against certain others; but we cannot (although we pretend we can). And it would be nice if we could spare every condemned killer and damage nothing else in the process; but life isn't that simple. This is the argument I made in my piece, and I won't repeat it here. But, in brief, it seems to me that the moral life of a community is an integrated whole, and that waffling on the issue of our absolute intolerance of deliberate murder reinforces many other sources of moral confusion.

The other serious objection is Mr. Weiner's; he writes that the talmudic rabbis imposed "procedural limitations" that made the death penalty virtually impossible to carry out. He is right, but let's look more closely.

It is undeniable that the mood of talmudic discussion is strongly against capital punishment on the whole. But it is also undeniable that (as I wrote) the Talmud never understands the biblical prohibition against murder to disallow capital punishment. That the talmudic rabbis were divided is clear in such passages as *Makkot* 1:10: several sages oppose the death penalty; Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel replies that the abolition of capital punishment "would certainly have increased bloodshed in Israel" (in other words, the murder rate would have shot up).

Most important, talmudic rabbis wrote in an age, culminating in the dominion of Rome, when the balance of power between the people and their brutal overlords was incomparably different from the relationship between American citizens and their government. "Love work," they wrote in another famous passage, "hate overlordship, seek no intimacy with power." They had good reason to hate and fear the authority of judges. In an age when the Roman authorities were murdering Jews wholesale by crucifixion, no decent man was in favor of the death penalty. Times change.

A few final points: Mr. Holobar's claim that "most conservatives would not trust the government to fill a hole in the road" is obviously false. We trust the government to defend the country in time of war, which is a larger responsibility than filling holes. We entrust it with the duty of

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Summer 1998, Number 132

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protecting public safety. Government makes a lot of mistakes. Hence our goal (mine, anyway) is to dislodge government from areas where it is not needed, and in areas where it obviously *is* needed—in criminal justice, for example—to make it work better.

Joel N. Eisen's claim that Kaczynski is "most likely a paranoid schizophrenic" is nonsense of the sort that dishonors psychiatry. He presents no evidence to support this claim, nor have I ever seen any. I could assert just as adamantly that the earth is most likely flat—and since I'm a scientist, you had better believe me.

I am grateful to readers who wrote letters in support of my article. The cultural climate is tumultuous and deeply discouraging. Those of us on the outs with today's cultural leadership are no majority, silent or otherwise, but I suspect there are more of us than anyone realizes. It's hard to judge the size of this Dissenters' movement because there is no politician to speak for it.

Jewish Studies

TO THE EDITOR:

As a Jewish historian of the European Middle Ages, with a specialty in women's history, I read Hillel Halkin's article, "Feminizing Jewish Studies" [February], with great interest. I thought his opening paragraphs and his analysis of the development of Jewish history were excellent and accurate. His point that Jewish feminist scholars often do not take history into consideration is well-taken and I certainly agree. But after making this telling accusation, he goes on to make the same mistake himself. Jewish history is much more than the 300 years of Ashkenazi *shtetl* culture, and using this single example as proof of anything in Jewish history is, at the very least, limiting and misleading.

The "feminization of Jewish men," a concept that has been much discussed in many recent works, depends almost solely on East European Jewish culture for its archetypes and standards. But the medieval Jewish men of Europe and the Near East who left home and family to travel the world for purposes of trade present a totally different picture. Likewise, Jewish men in medieval Spain spanned the gamut of economic classes from poor artisans and farmers to courtiers, poets, and scholars.

Jews had varying ideas about what women and men were "supposed" to do or be, depending on the century, the community, and the influence of the majority culture. But the fact that there was a gender-based division of function remained constant throughout the ages: women's activities, whatever they were, were always less valued than men's.

Another of Mr. Halkin's assumptions, equally false in my view, is his blanket agreement with the claims of earlier scholars that "the historical position of Jewish women was often markedly better than that of non-Jewish ones." I have been engaged in a study of that premise for the past several years and have found no adequate proof of it. Once again, Mr. Halkin relies on a single example: the East European Ashkenazi Jewish community of the early modern period, a community that placed a "low, negative value on physical prowess and courage, self-assertiveness and sexual libido." Has he forgotten some of the spicier talmudic stories? These indicate that some Jewish sages of antiquity and of the early Middle Ages hardly lacked sexual libido.

But even using the example of the stereotypical Ashkenazi male scholar, the assumption that Jewish women were better off works only if one believes that a warlike male is always more threatening to females than a gentle, studious one. This may not be so. There is ample proof of wife-beating from medieval times through our own day to suggest that abuses, physical or otherwise, are the result not only of a culture of brutality but of the assumption that one gender is inferior and must be controlled and governed by the other.

Mr. Halkin writes: "Once objective evidentiary truth is discarded as a theoretical possibility, let alone as a practical goal, historical writing slides easily into agitprop." Yet one of the earliest lessons a serious historian learns is that there is no "objective evidentiary truth." Every individual approaches history with biases and assumptions. The trick is to recognize and acknowledge them beforehand and then to work around them or try to compensate for them. Not only has Mr. Halkin failed to do that, he resists the very idea that it is necessary.

Suggesting, as he does at the end of his article, that this new "feminist" scholarship is "not providing [our] community with the intellectual leadership it needs" is perhaps the proof that Mr. Halkin himself may be falling into "agitprop." Do we have a right to demand that our scholars' first duty is to serve the needs of the Jewish community as these needs are perceived by its leadership elite? Such an attitude creates a climate in which polemic replaces serious research and Jewish history itself becomes self-serving and suspect. Feminist theory is one of the factors that has contributed to the broadening of Jewish scholarship and helped to erase yesterday's polemics disguised as history.

I respectfully suggest that Mr. Halkin's criterion for what is acceptable scholarship is how closely it conforms to *his* preconceived idea of exactly what God's image was when that Supreme Being created "male and female."

EMILY TAITZ
Great Neck, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin says that East European Jewry was composed of "a majority of *proste yidn* or 'plain Jews' and a minority of *sheyne yidn* or 'fine Jews.'" Actually, *prost* is a derogatory term meaning crude or even rude. The terms commonly used for the majority of Jews were *balbatisher*, for a solid householder, and *ehrlikher*, for someone not especially learned but honest in all respects.

SUE GOLDEN LERNER
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin says that Jewish studies has "been one of the American Jewish community's most impressive cultural achievements."

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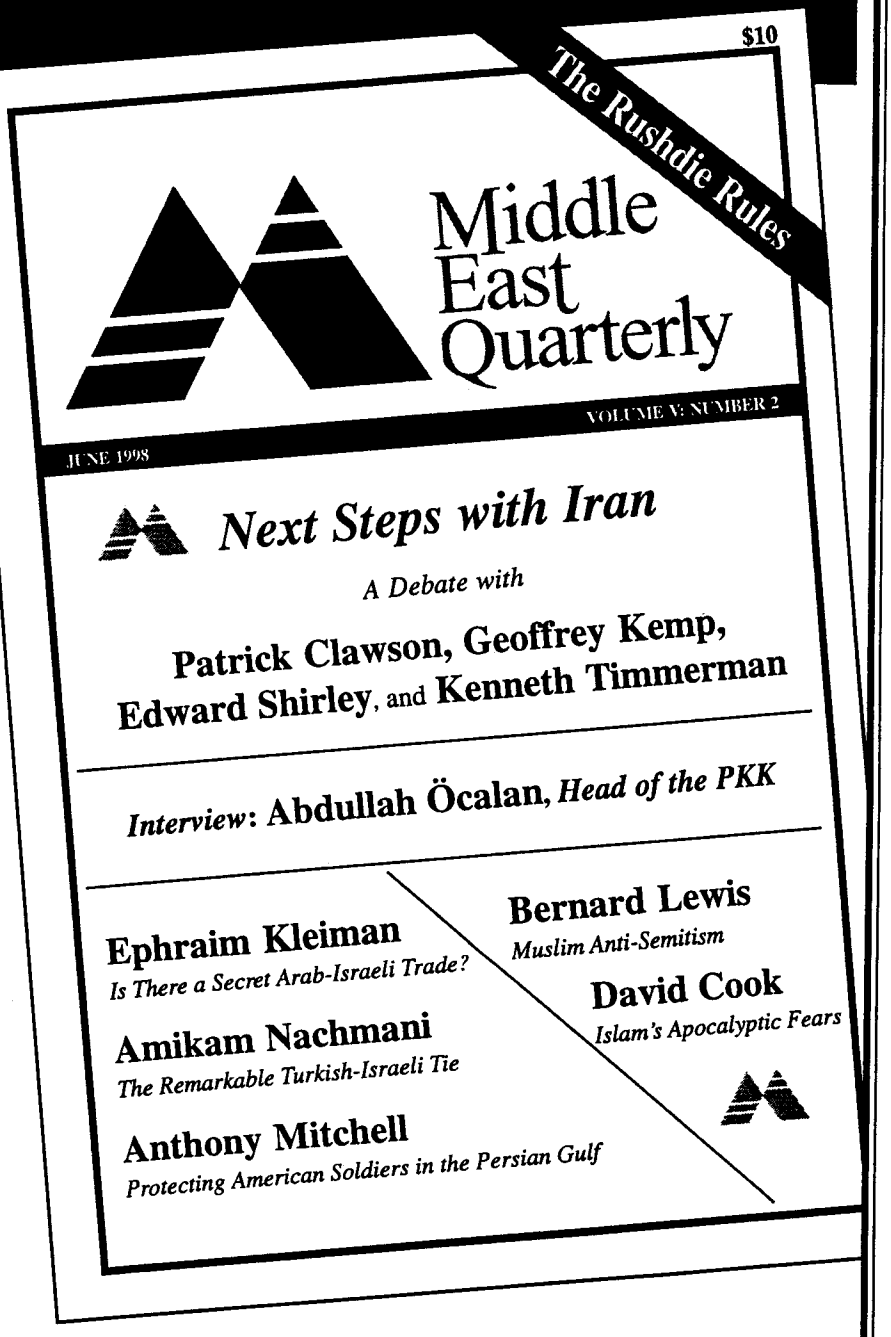

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But Mr. Halkin does not inform his readers that the Torah-observant community in Israel and America strongly opposed the creation of such studies in academic settings, for reasons he himself sets forth in his article. And, as he adds, not only are the new, feminized Jewish studies already "strongly entrenched" in the universities, but since most of the professors are young, "with long careers ahead of them . . . , American Jews will be living with their thinking for decades to come."

One must also note that in spite of the spread of Jewish studies to so many American campuses, the American Jewish community's "impressive cultural achievement" has been accompanied by an intermarriage rate of over 50 percent.

The feminization of Jewish studies is the logical outcome of its being established in academic settings in the first place. I do not know why Mr. Halkin is so surprised.

MOSES MORDECAI TWERSKY
Providence, Rhode Island

TO THE EDITOR:

The feminizing of Jewish studies that Hillel Halkin sharply analyzes and sensibly deplores reflects the rampant pro-choice Judaism that now flourishes in the United States. Anything that happens to engage American Jews—from feminism to "Ju-Buddhism" to intermarriage—is easily absorbed in the American rendition of Judaism without norms.

In the writing of American Jewish history, the tiny corner of Jewish studies that I occasionally inhabit, the trends are no less distressing. From 19th-century Reform to 20th-century Zionism, from Marxian socialism to bourgeois consumerism, American Jews have Americanized everything from synagogue ritual to the kitchen sink and called it "Jewish." Diaspora deviance, as Mr. Halkin suggests, has all but become the Jewish norm. Yet this transformation and reinvention of Jewish culture in the United States is ratified as "Jewish" by the very historians who should know better.

The Americanization of Jewish history, like the feminization of Jewish studies, reveals a community, as Mr. Halkin shrewdly observes, that suffers from "a loss of boundaries and a deep confusion about its identity."

JEROLD S. AUERBACH
Wellesley College
Wellesley, Massachusetts

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

I thank Jerold S. Auerbach for his remarks. As a member of the academic profession, he is in a position to confirm from the inside what I wrote of as an outsider.

Not belonging to the "Torah-observant" community, I never thought to inform my readers of its opposition to the teaching of Jewish studies in universities as set forth by Moses Mordecai Twersky. But while this opposition may be consistent with Mr. Twersky's values, it is not consistent with mine. Although the pursuit of knowledge inevitably runs the risk of being debased, I do not consider conscientious abstention from it to be the better alternative.

Sue Golden Lerner, who no doubt also calls old people "senior citizens," wants me to say *balbatishe yidn* instead of *proste yidn*. The two, however, are not the same thing. A *balbatisher yid* was a Jew who was not badly off economically; the ordinary workmen, peddlers, and artisans of the *shtetl* often lived in penury. And *prost* is not a derogatory term. Its primary meaning is "ordinary" or "common," and although, like the word "common" in English, it can have the secondary meaning of "vulgar," a *proster yid* is a common Jew in the common sense of the word. As for *erlikh*, "honest," this is full-fledged PC-ese. Does Sue Golden Lerner really think there were no dishonest *proste yidn* in the *shtetl*?

Finally, Emily Taitz criticizes me for things I never said. I did not claim that "Ashkenazi *shtetl* culture" was a more representative or important episode of Jewish history than others; I concentrated on it in my article because so did one of the books I discussed, Daniel Boyarin's *Unheroic Conduct*. Nor did I at any point deny that Jewish life in the past was consistently "gender-based" or that men's activities were publicly valued more than women's. I did observe, and I will stick by it, that, relatively speaking, the situation of Jewish women was "often" (which is not the same as "always") better than that of non-Jewish women living in proximity to them. Emily Taitz says she has found no "adequate proof" of this. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the matter, but, putting Ashkenazi Jewry aside, surely, to take but one example, the fact that a Muslim wife could be divorced anywhere by a few peremptory words on her husband's part while a Jewish wife could be divorced only with her own consent says something about the advantage to a woman of being Jewish in the Islamic world.

Nor does anyone love a spicy talmudic story better than I do. However, I know such stories well enough to assure Emily Taitz that there is not a single one of them in which sexual libido, when it fails to serve the cause of marital harmony, is not condemned as a feature of the *yetser hara*, the "evil urge" that the God-fearing Jew is enjoined to shun and repudiate.

To one of the charges I plead guilty: that of a belief in "objective evidentiary truth." Of course "every individual approaches history with biases and assumptions." It did not take the postmodernists to discover this. Thucydides, who begins his history of the Peloponnesian War with a discussion of his own beliefs and of the impossibility of ever acquiring an exact knowledge of the past, knew it, too. But it is the responsibility of the honest historian not merely to "work around or compensate for" such biases—this is the language of weaseling—but to be prepared to reject them utterly when the facts disprove them. Perhaps Emily Taitz does not believe in facts, either. Old-fashioned though it may be of me, I do.

Indeed, it is precisely because I do that I also believe that a scholar's first duty is to scholarship, which should never be compromised by other considerations. But the American Jewish community's first duty (and this is perhaps the one point on

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which I agree with Mr. Twersky) is not to scholarship, it is to itself; and whether it should support Jewish scholarship that undermines its own existence is a question that it might wish to weigh.

Evolution & the Mind

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur B. Cody's argument in his review of Steven Pinker's *How the Mind Works* [Books in Review, March] is a parody of sloppy New Age thinking. Pinker's use of evolutionary theory in explaining human behavior, Mr. Cody asserts, is "wildly fanciful, a work of fiction." Why? Because evolution consists of genetic change, and "we cannot map the passage from genetic structure to human behavior." Why not? Because genes "do *not* code for mating rituals, for fight or flight responses." Rather, Mr. Cody informs us,

> a single gene codes for a single protein; that is all, no more and no less. . . . [H]ow many [genes] would be required to make some trait . . . ? The answer is profoundly unknown.

And he concludes that

> there may indeed be some natural process at work in constructing an organism or a species by means of instructions laid down in the DNA double helix. But if so, it has not been revealed.

The reader should understand that this is not an attack on Steven Pinker alone or even on evolutionary psychology—it is an attack on *all* evolutionary theory. The basic evolutionary model states that genotype affects phenotype and, through natural selection, phenotype affects genotype. The result is the evolution of both genotype and phenotype. But if Mr. Cody is correct, we cannot argue that genotype affects phenotype, except in that very tiny number of cases in which we know the *precise mechanism* through which this occurs. Darwin (who not only did not know about DNA but did not even know about genes) must have been "wildly fanciful" in his analysis of Galapagos fauna. To Mr. Cody, the neo-Darwinian synthesis in evolutionary biology, as widely accepted a theory as any in modern science, is simply a "work of fiction."

If Mr. Cody understands the scientific method, he gives no evidence of it here. And though supposedly a philosopher, he appears never to have heard of even the most elementary distinctions such as those among material, formal, final, and efficient causes (Aristotle). For example: we knew that incest reduces the viability of offspring long before we knew how it does so, and we knew that smoking reduces life expectancy long before we understood the mechanism involved. Similarly, we know in considerable detail and with precise and predictive models that evolution affects the behavior of organisms, but in spite of advances in biochemistry over the past two decades, there is much we still do not know about the causal mechanisms leading from genotype to phenotype. Nor is it certain that we will ever be able to chart the pathways from genes to behavior, since complex biological systems may well have emergent properties that cannot be predicted from their underlying constituent parts. But this does not compromise behavioral ecology in the slightest.

Steven Pinker argues that human beings have brain structures that affect behavior in specific ways, that these brain structures are a product of the genetic constitution of human beings, and that this genetic constitution is the product of biological evolution. These arguments are all true, I believe, and none depends on having any detailed knowledge of developmental biochemistry. Pinker may be wrong in whole or in part in his specific assertions, but Mr. Cody's arguments are quite beside the point, and his review completely uninformative.

HERBERT GINTIS
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Having read several laudatory reviews of Steven Pinker's book on the mind, I found it a pleasure to read the insightful one by Arthur B. Cody.

When all else fails, it is the common practice of popular writing in biology to invoke the tautology of natural selection to account for complex properties of organisms. As Mr. Cody points out so well, genetics has limited explanatory power for making a cell, much less an organism.

However, it is possible to provide some answers to his questions of how many genes are involved in making an eye. Experiments indicate that mutations in some two-thirds of the genes of a fruit fly affect the development of the eye. That means roughly 10,000 genes are involved. If a similar fraction of the genome were involved in the eye development of humans, the number of "eye" genes would be increased five to tenfold. The permutations and combinations of variations from mutations among such large numbers of genes rise to numbers too large to be handled by any conceivable computer in predicting the developmental outcome of the functions of those genes. Similar numbers of genes are likely to contribute to the development of other organs.

To say that development is determined by natural selection is a meaningless statement because there is no set of experiments that can prove it. As Niels Bohr said in a paraphrase of Wittgenstein, "Science must pass over in silence what it cannot define by experiment." It will take a quantum advance in biological thought before we can cope with such problems.

HARRY RUBIN
Department of Molecular and Cell Biology
University of California
Berkeley, California

ARTHUR B. CODY writes:

Herbert Gintis, a noted economist who has also ably defended Darwinism for many years, maintains that there are few if any explanations in science that are supported by a complete understanding of the processes at work. In this I agree with him. He also reminds us of what Darwin accomplished without any knowledge of genetics; but we are not in a similar position today. It is not that our present knowledge is limited, as Mr. Gintis states, but rather the reverse: we

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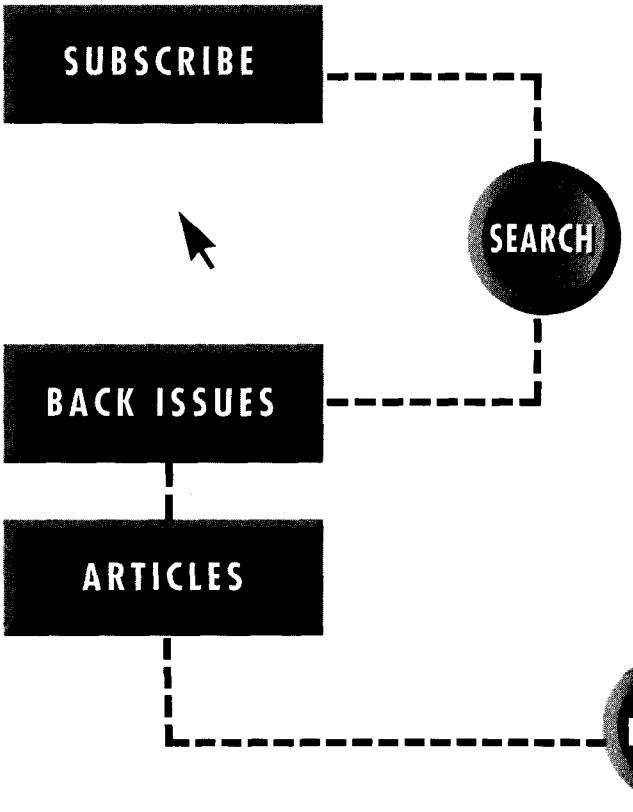

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know a lot, and what we know goes against the cornerstone of the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution, the claim that variation in the phenotype is the result of random changes in the copious genotype.

We know with certainty that the human genome consists of no more than 100,000 genes, and we know that genes express proteins, not body plans. We also have reason to believe that the fertilized egg through which inheritance moves contains important molecules other than DNA, but none is a candidate for the implementation of the informational program ascribed to the DNA molecule. The DNA helix alone is simply not big enough to provide all the information required to build an organism—including, among other things, every regulatory system; every accommodation to injury and sickness; every system of fluid, muscular, and electrical movement; every complex organ from kidney to brain; and now, according to Steven Pinker and others, every mental disposition and cognitive dimension.

From this, however, I do not conclude that Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who maintained that evolution progresses by the inheritance of acquired traits, was right, though it might appear that only directed evolution gets us through the numbers; instead, I recommend patience. For we still do not know how evolution actually works. Natural selection is plausible, and, as such, it not only permits but encourages teleological speculation disguised as scientific reasoning. Plausibility quiets the nerves but it is not proof. It may turn out, and I suspect it will, that the "quantum advance in biological thought" that Harry Rubin anticipates will reveal the principles of evolution to be no less unique and implausible in biology than those of quantum theory have proved to be in physics.

Mr. Rubin, a member of the National Academy of Science, has had a long and distinguished career in cell biology and immunology. I am happy indeed to have his support and to be informed of the experiments to which he refers. Those experiments lead to the astonishing conclusion that *two-thirds* of a fruit fly's genes "affect the development" of the eye. Obviously, two-thirds of the fly's DNA information is not devoted exclusively to the eye; instead, the implication is that there are many systems so intimately related to the eye that mutations in them bring about changes in the eye as well.

This feature of organic development adds enormously to the task natural selection is called upon to perform. The standard thesis insists that all mutations in the genotype occur randomly; any other suggestion introduces purpose or design into the process, and that is strictly forbidden. But if the development from one eye stage to the next requires a random search of *all* related systems, the numbers involved in such a search would be truly staggering.

To be more specific: consider first the number of possible proteins in the design space. There are 20 amino acids that can be strung together in groups of 50 to 5,000 in forming a protein. That means a base 20 raised to the 50th power, plus 20 to the 51st power, and so on to 20 to the 5,000th power. (The number 10 raised to the 100th power, an insignificantly little number by comparison, is said to count all the subatomic particles in the universe.) Now combine that number of possible proteins with tens of thousands like it in the systems simultaneously affected by any change in the eye and you see what Mr. Rubin means by a resultant number no *conceivable* computer could handle.

Consider then Steven Pinker's supposition that all the habits, attitudes, evaluations, predilections, and so forth of the mind are laid down in the brain through a process of natural selection perfected in a few million years while our ancestors were hunting and gathering. The random process of natural selection working on the genotype for so formidable an achievement seems not merely inadequate but altogether infeasible.

Now to a correction. In my review, the numbers I used in going from the human DNA molecule to the human genome were bollixed, even though the conclusion remains the same—i.e., the total number of human genes lies between an estimated low of 60,000 and a high of 100,000. The correct reasoning goes as follows: begin with six billion base pairs in the genome that include inputs from both parents; reduce that to three billion as the resultant collection for the individual; reduce that by 90 percent of junk DNA; reduce that by, say, 90 percent for the introns and other codons not used in protein expression (though used in numerous other ways)—and you get 30 million. Divide 30 million by an average of 300 nucleotides (or 100 codons), and the final number is 100,000. This calculation is meant only to illustrate the relationship between the total DNA molecule and the number of genes in the human genome; it serves no other purpose.

Counting Noses

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Counting Noses at the *Harvard Crimson*" [April], Justin C. Danilewitz launches an attack on our newspaper, claiming that he was not selected to be editorial chair because he was not the kind of Jew the *Crimson* was looking for—namely, one willing to turn his back on other Jews. He claims that we are, however, and that while in office we have instituted a "new policy" at the *Crimson*, "a program designed to promote the most superficial kind of diversity—the diversity of skin color." He alleges that this policy cost him a position as a columnist.

Mr. Danilewitz is dealing in fictions. No such anti-Semitic policy or program exists at the *Crimson*, nor have we ever wished for one. In selecting among the 43 applicants for the position of biweekly columnist, we sought responsible students whose work would engage our diverse readership and challenge them to consider new ideas and new perspectives. There were simply more qualified candidates than Mr. Danilewitz—including the co-chair of Harvard Students

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for Israel and another active member of Harvard-Radcliffe Hillel. We did not employ quotas in our selection of columnists, and we did not reject anyone because of his or her race, religion, or gender. In fact, we increased the total number of columnists from ten to seventeen, with the number of Jewish columnists rising from eight to ten this semester. Moreover, despite Mr. Danilewitz's absence, 80 percent of current *Crimson* editorial-board executives are Jewish—no fewer than last year.

It is true, as Mr. Danilewitz points out, that we dismissed one conservative Jewish columnist. But this student's dismissal had nothing to do with either his religion or his political views; he was let go because, having written for two years, he was no longer offering our readers a fresh perspective.

On one point Mr. Danilewitz is correct. Both of us have a strong commitment to diversifying the *Crimson*'s editorial page. As Mr. Danilewitz noted, we pointed in our position papers to the fact that 80 percent of the columnists last year were Jewish as evidence that the *Crimson*'s editorial page did not adequately reflect the diversity of opinion on campus. But Mr. Danilewitz fails to mention that we also pointed to the fact that the number of columnists who were female, nonwhite, or science majors was too low.

Our interest is not in excluding anyone, but in including as many different perspectives as we can. We disagree with Mr. Danilewitz's assumption that this effort makes us bad Jews. In fact, we believe Judaism is commensurate with the values of inclusion, expression, and understanding that we hold dear.

GEOFFREY C. UPTON
Editorial Chair
DANIEL M. SULEIMAN
Editorial Chair
Harvard Crimson
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Justin C. Danilewitz's discussion of the *Harvard Crimson* reminds me of a macabre joke we refugee German Jews made after we had been lucky enough to get out of Nazi Germany. The joke referred to those Jews, including some in my own family, who thought that Jewish behavior, particularly "pushiness" in attaining prominent positions in business and cultural life, was at least in part responsible for the anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime. In hindsight, we used to say that such Jews carried banners with the slogan, "*Hinaus mit Uns*" ("Out with us Jews").

The attitude of Geoffrey C. Upton and Daniel M. Suleiman at the *Harvard Crimson* seems to be similar, with this difference: the German Jews acted out of a blind yet honest super-assimilationist view of their place in German society. Messrs. Upton and Suleiman seem to be doing what they are doing proudly and consciously in the name of a deeply unjust and self-abasing principle of "social justice" euphemistically called diversity.

ROBERT B. GOLDMANN
New York City

JUSTIN C. DANILEWITZ writes:

Geoffrey C. Upton and Daniel M. Suleiman not only fail to refute any of the criticisms I made in my article, they confirm in their own words that they were indeed "counting noses" at the *Harvard Crimson*: "We pointed in our position papers [campaigning to become editors of the paper] to the fact that 80 percent of the columnists last year were Jewish." To this day they remain blithely unaware of the offensive nature of such a practice; instead, they defend it in the name of "diversity." As for their claim that, in selecting columnists for the *Crimson* this year, they did not exclude anyone and actually increased the number of Jewish columnists from eight to ten, what they do not say is that by this maneuver they achieved precisely the goal (quota?) set forth in their position papers: namely, *reducing* the percentage of Jewish columnists.

And what kind of diversity has been achieved in the process? Under Messrs. Upton and Suleiman, the *Crimson* can indeed boast of having more columnists representing certain defined groups. Whether there is greater or lesser *intellectual* diversity at the paper than before they took over is, however, another question entirely. I for one would be prepared to defend the proposition that, precisely because of the "groupthink" regime imposed by Messrs. Upton and Suleiman, the range of opinion at the paper has narrowed markedly.

Incidentally, I never said, as they allege, that Messrs. Upton and Suleiman are "bad Jews." I do believe, however, that they have not only bad but terrible ideas.

I want to thank Robert B. Goldmann for his interesting letter. I found it all the more timely in light of a remark by an acquaintance of mine who wondered whether the *Crimson*'s new policy might really be doing the Jewish community at Harvard a service, by toning down the "pushiness" of aspiring Jewish editorialists and thus making them just a little less conspicuous. It seems that in some quarters the mantra of "*Hinaus mit Uns*" persists.

Correction

In Gabriel Schoenfeld's article, "Auschwitz and the Professors," in our June issue, Michael Berenbaum's former position was given incorrectly. Mr. Berenbaum was director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's research institute.—ED.

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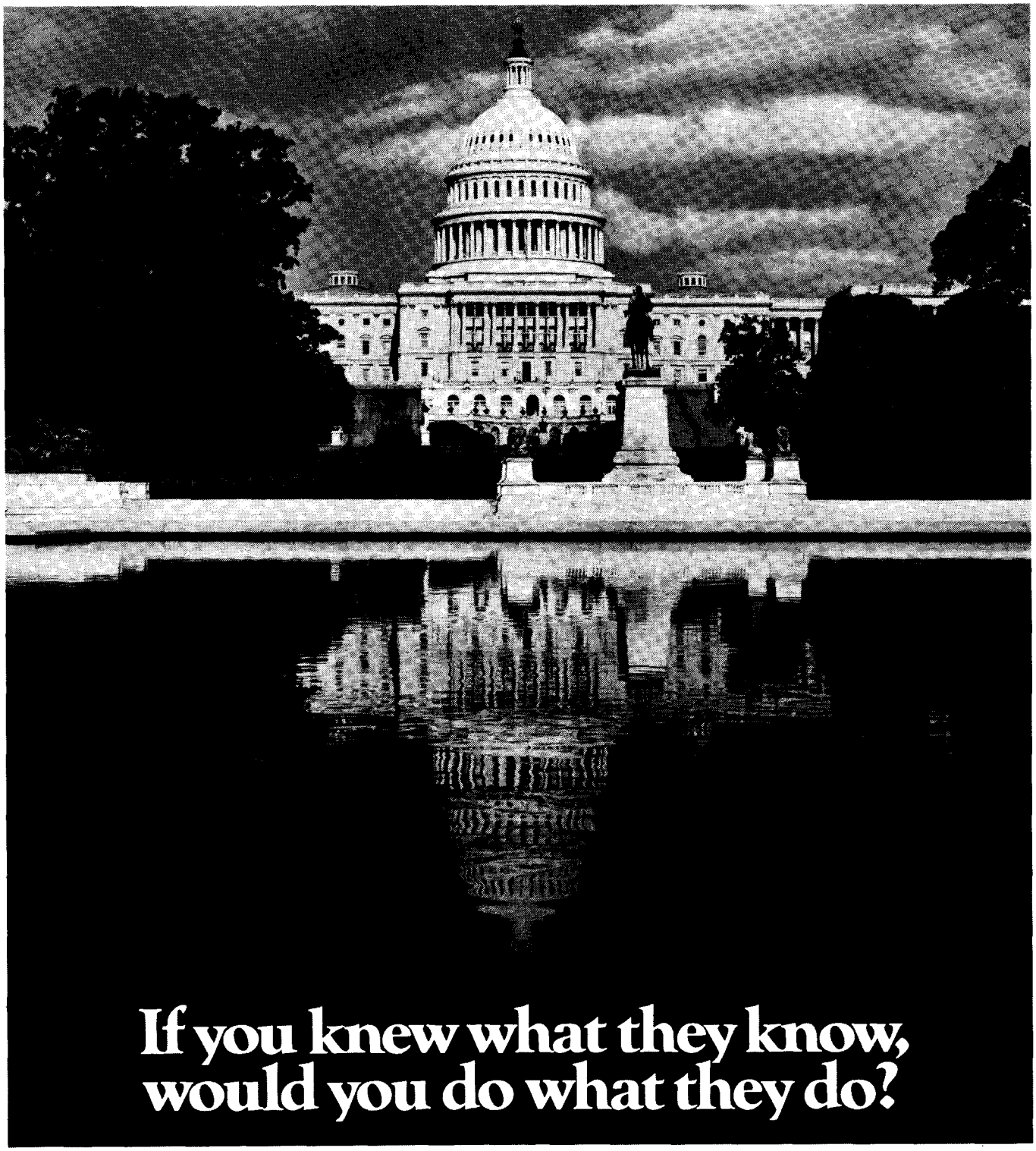

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Commentary
July 1998

Now May We Please Defend Ourselves?

Robert Kagan & Gary Schmitt

It was major news when India and Pakistan conducted underground nuclear tests in early May; it should not have been. At least twenty countries, in the words of a 1995 report by the CIA, "already have or may be developing weapons of mass destruction and ballistic-missile delivery systems." As the cases of India and Pakistan attest, not all these countries are adversaries of the United States, although in the Middle East or South Asia, where nearly half are located, domestic instability could change their orientation rapidly. Among them, however, are some of the most dangerous and unpredictable regimes on earth. According to the CIA, five such regimes—North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria—"already have or are developing ballistic missiles that could threaten U.S. interests."

Much ink has been spilled over the question of whether the United States already faces or will soon face the prospect of a missile attack against its own territory. What should be obvious today is how limited is our ability to predict the answer. Intelligence estimates have proved wildly inaccurate in the past—compare our severe underestimation of Saddam Hussein's weapons programs before the Gulf war with what we learned during and after it. North Korea has already deployed the No Dong-1 missile, capable of threatening Japan and U.S. forces in Northeast Asia, and within less than two years Iran may deploy the Shahab-3, capable of striking targets throughout the Middle East; both these systems have come on line far more rapidly than U.S. intelligence analysts foresaw. And of course India's tests in May took us completely by surprise.

But although we may not know precisely when the new threats will emerge, we should know for a certainty that we have entered a new strategic environment. In that environment, the number of states trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them will grow, and the threat posed by such weapons will become an increasingly standard feature of international life.

There is a logic driving this reality. The collapse of the Soviet empire, and with it the bipolar cold-war world, has loosened the constraints on states whose behavior was once fairly tightly regulated by Moscow. To cite the most obvious example, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait would probably not have occurred when the Soviet Union was still Iraq's major patron and weapons supplier; strenuous efforts would have been made to head off a regional crisis so clearly involving American interests, and so fraught with the potential of escalation to a nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers. Now, however, smaller rogue states and would-be

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aggressors enjoy the freedom to pursue their goals in regions of strategic importance to the United States and its allies, constrained only by the fear that the United States itself might respond with overwhelming military force.

That constraint is theoretically considerable, as the Gulf war demonstrated. Where *ordinary* modes of aggression are concerned, American conventional military power has been and will continue to be an obstacle to most adventurism. But that is precisely why many small and middle-sized states are turning to unconventional weapons: as a means of circumventing the enormous disparity in conventional power. And this, too, was a lesson of the Gulf war—namely, that the United States and its allies have no effective answer to a hostile force equipped with mobile ballistic missiles.

Inaccurate as Iraq's Scuds were, they proved a dangerous wild card in the war, raising problems both military and diplomatic. About a quarter of all American casualties came from the launch of a single missile against our military facilities at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia. Iraqi missile attacks on Israel, designed to provoke that country's entry into the war, threatened to break apart the international coalition the U.S. had laboriously constructed and maintained. Finally, in order to find and destroy Scud missiles hidden in the Iraqi desert, American pilots had to fly more than 2,000 sorties, a tremendous diversion of valuable resources that proved, in any event, almost completely unsuccessful.

IN SHORT, despite overwhelming American superiority in the Gulf war, Saddam Hussein nevertheless retained until the very end the capacity to inflict a possibly catastrophic strategic blow. That lesson has not been lost on present and future challengers to regional peace, in the Middle East and elsewhere; unable to match the U.S. plane for plane, tank for tank, governments throughout the third world are finding in ballistic missiles a new weapon of choice.

Nor has the lesson been lost on American military planners. Until the recent shift in the strategic environment, America's ability to project power was limited only by its capacity to bring sufficient force to bear at an appropriate point and in a timely manner. Now the U.S. faces a new set of "asymmetrical" challenges—or, in the Pentagon-speak of the recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), "unconventional approaches to circumvent or undermine our strengths while exploiting our vulnerabilities."

Suppose, to begin with the starkest case, that a foreign power possesses missiles capable of reaching U.S. territory. Any American President contemplating a challenge to such a regime would have to weigh the risk of a retaliatory attack on America itself. The prospect is not as remote as it may seem. In late 1995, as tensions escalated between China and Taiwan, a senior Chinese official sent a warning to the U.S. that Beijing felt free to act militarily because U.S. politicians "care more about Los Angeles than they do about Taiwan." American strategists may not have taken the veiled threat altogether seriously, but as the Chinese missile program continues to develop—and, thanks to the Clinton administration's technology transfers, it is developing more rapidly than it otherwise would—the next time there is a crisis over Taiwan things could appear very different.

Even if an aggressor does not have missiles capable of reaching the United States, it may be able to hold American allies hostage to its designs. What would have been the effect on our ability to pull together a coalition of NATO allies to drive Saddam's army out of Kuwait if Iraq had possessed a few weapons able to strike Munich or Paris? One can easily imagine the arguments that would have been put forward to allow him to keep his territorial gains rather than evict him from Kuwait.

We can already see this kind of deterrent effect at work in Northeast Asia, where North Korea's ability to strike Japan—and, a few years hence, Alaska and Hawaii—has given that poor, starving country a vastly disproportionate degree of influence on the international scene, putting strains on the U.S.-Japanese alliance and limiting American options for dealing with potential crises on the Korean peninsula. Driven by fear of North Korean missiles, and of the regime's program to develop nuclear weapons, we and others have made otherwise unimaginable concessions to a vicious dictatorship. As more states follow North Korea's example, American diplomacy will be correlatively weakened elsewhere.

And not just American diplomacy. Ballistic missiles will have a direct impact on America's ability to project force into regions of vital importance. Even armed with high-explosive warheads, missiles can pose huge problems for American bases, troop concentrations, port facilities, airfields, and centers of command, control, and communication; armed with nuclear, chemical, or biological warheads, they can spell the unthinkable. As the QDR points out, adversaries can exploit our vulnerability in order to deter or, if it comes to that, defeat an otherwise vastly superior American military force.

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The cumulative effect of these various threats—against the American population, against American allies, and against American forces abroad—is likely to be severe. It has been difficult enough these past few years to sustain an American commitment to maintain the peace and enforce international rules in key regions of the world. Increased uncertainty about America's willingness or ability to act will loosen the bonds of alliances that depend, ultimately, on U.S. military dominance. The result will be to discourage friends, encourage adversaries, and elevate the status of rogue states bent on molding the environment to their taste—in sum, gradually and ineluctably to wear out the fabric of the present international order.

CAN ANYTHING be done? In theory, the United States and its allies could rely on international nonproliferation agreements to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. Or, alternatively, the U.S. could act unilaterally to destroy plants and facilities where it suspects such weapons are being developed, as the Israeli government did in Iraq in 1981.

Unfortunately, neither option is promising. Efforts to prevent proliferation may somewhat slow the trend toward wider dispersion of weapons technologies, but for reasons of both strategic and economic self-interest, significant players in the international system—including Russia and China—cannot be counted on to cooperate. In any case, the know-how, the hardware, and the software have spread well beyond a few select powers. India's test, followed by Pakistan's answering effort two weeks later, should convince even the most fervent believer in nonproliferation accords of the inherent unreliability of any international regime.

Nor is the United States likely to act preemptively to destroy suspected weapons sites or production facilities. Presidents Bush and Clinton both balked at such action in the case of North Korea, thus bequeathing the feeble diplomatic process now under way. But even had they been more inclined to act, there is another consideration here: as our experience with Iraq and now India has shown, American intelligence cannot be depended upon to discover the extent or even the precise location of a nation's weapons program. In their early stages, such programs are hard to monitor and raise few alarms; by the time they reach more advanced stages, the existence of the weapons themselves acts as a deterrent to military action, and it is then too late anyway to destroy the technical know-how that has been acquired.

If neither nonproliferation nor unilateral action is a realistic response to the new strategic environment, there is nevertheless one thing we can and should do both to protect ourselves and to redress the international balance in our favor. That is to develop and to deploy ballistic-missile *defenses*. Such defenses would inure us to the threat of an attack on American soil and enable us to protect our forces and our allies overseas.

Yet here we come up against a curious combination of domestic forces. Although many Democrats have moved far enough away from their McGovernite past to embrace the view that the United States is the world's "indispensable nation," when it comes to building the defenses necessary to make that idea a reality they remain mired in cold-war habits of mind, devoted religiously to the now-26-year-old Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty with the Soviet Union. Republicans, on the other hand, have mostly retained their Reagan-era zeal for missile defense, but they have conspicuously failed to place it within a broader strategic agenda. When it comes to missile defense, Democratic "old-think" has thus formed a deadly alliance with Republican "no-think."

Since it first took office in 1993, the overriding goal of the Clinton administration in this area has been to preserve the ABM treaty, which essentially prohibits any national defense against missile attack and frustrates development of the most effective regional defenses for our troops and our allies. The administration cut planned expenditures on ballistic-missile defense for the last half of the 1990's by more than 50 percent, totally eliminating the program to develop space-based interceptors, reducing funds for a national defense by 80 percent, and slicing approximately another 30 percent from programs targeted at knocking down short- and regional-range missiles. When it comes to new systems capable of protecting far larger areas against longer-range ballistic missiles—of the sort, for example, North Korea has just deployed and Iran is close to fielding—the administration has either denied funds at critical times or provided so little money that development remains largely a paper exercise. Adequate funding has been forthcoming only for what are basically "upgrades" of current systems already deployed to protect pockets of troops and ships.

Perhaps the administration's most damaging decision came in 1993, when it killed development of the program known as "Brilliant Pebbles" and thus effectively ruled out the deployment of space-based systems. Space is, simply, the best venue from which to defend the United States, its overseas

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troops, and its allies from all but short-range ballistic-missile attack. The reason is that it is much easier for a space-based interceptor to find, track, and destroy a large fuel-burning missile during its boost or early mid-course phase—that is, before it dispenses its warhead(s)—than for a ground-based interceptor either to find and destroy warheads tumbling at a high velocity into the atmosphere, perhaps hidden by a cloud of decoys, or to handle a plethora of sub-munitions (bomblets) released above the atmosphere.

And space-based defense is a feasible option. Not only is much of the hardware associated with "Brilliant Pebbles" mature by now but, thanks to advances in component miniaturization and to economies in procurement, it is affordable. "Star Wars," to use the liberals' derisive term for Ronald Reagan's vision of an American strategic-defense initiative, is no longer a pipe dream. But since deployment of "Brilliant Pebbles" would violate the ABM treaty, the Clinton administration put an end to it.

The administration's pious adherence to the nostrums of yesteryear almost defies comprehension. Russian nuclear arsenals are now declining rapidly: where the arms-control process known as START II called for reductions on both the American and the Russian side to 3,500 warheads, Russia now wants to cut back to 1,000 warheads or fewer in the coming years. Moreover, the bipolar nuclear confrontation has long since ceased to be the salient feature of international relations. Nevertheless, Democrats in Congress and the White House continue to genuflect not only before the ABM treaty but before the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) that the treaty enshrines. That doctrine—as none other than Henry Kissinger, the ABM treaty's author, has pointed out—was "barely plausible when there was only one nuclear opponent"; it "makes no sense in a multipolar world of proliferating nuclear powers," particularly ones of a very different stripe from the largely risk-averse adversary we faced for most of the cold war.

In any case, MAD was never intended to apply to nations other than the Soviet Union, our "peer competitor" in unconventional forces, and it is utterly meaningless in the new era. Suppose a ballistic missile were fired at Saudi Arabia by a dictator like Saddam Hussein, aiming for personal glory and indifferent to the fate of millions of his own people. Is it credible that we would be willing to turn Baghdad into the next Hiroshima to punish his aggression? What if, even, a missile were launched by an unauthorized military officer in Russia or China, neither of which has adequate safeguards against such launches? Would we risk Armageddon because one of those countries lost control of a single general? Protecting ourselves and our allies against just such contingencies is precisely the promise of a ballistic-missile defense system—and it is also precisely the promise that the Democrats repudiate.

The supreme irony of the Clinton administration's policy is that it has allowed liberal critics to argue that we have little or nothing to show for what we have spent on missile defense. They are right, but only because the administration has consistently pulled the rug out from under the very programs that would make a difference.

AND WHAT have the Republicans been doing for the past five years? Even though anti-missile systems are professedly their defense program of choice, the answer is that they have been losing. In 1995, a national defense against ballistic missiles was one of only two items in the "Contract with America" that failed to pass the Republican-controlled House. Congress did manage to give the Pentagon a mandate to develop and deploy systems to defend against shorter-range missiles, but President Clinton, after signing the bill, allowed his Secretary of Defense to ignore it. Republicans took the administration to court, lost—and that was the end of that. They stood aside as funds were cut for precisely those programs now needed to handle the threats posed by North Korea and Iran.

Another Republican loss in 1995 occurred in connection with the defense-authorization bill, which specified a system for defending the United States itself against a rudimentary missile attack by the year 2003. Clinton vetoed the measure, and the Republican Congress capitulated. The following year, rather than risk another veto, it decided to put the measure into a separate "Defend America Act," but the proposed bill never made it to the floor for a vote.

One reason conservatives and Republicans have been losing on what is supposedly their top defense priority is that they have been unwilling to make a sustained fight to overturn the ABM treaty. As a result, they are trapped, calling for a "national missile defense" while finessing the status of a treaty that explicitly prohibits the creation of any such defense, or even laying the basis for one. This is a circle that cannot be squared. Because of its various limitations—especially on the use of space—letting the ABM treaty stand means placing a ceiling over the progress that can be made toward defending American citizens, troops, and allies. Unless the

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treaty is overturned, the most effective theater missile defenses will never be built, and no national defense that is more than marginally effective will ever be possible.*

To make a case against the ABM treaty is hardly as difficult as Republicans appear to imagine. During the 1960's and 1970's, it may have been reasonable to assume that any American attempt to build an effective defense would only lead to a more rapid Soviet build-up of missiles and warheads to saturate it. For the Soviets, this would even have made economic sense: for every dollar the United States could expect to spend on defense, the Soviets needed to spend only 50 cents to defeat what were then still rather rudimentary technologies.

In today's strategic environment, however, the calculus works in the opposite direction. No other country is willing or able to spend the kind of money that would be necessary to defeat an American system of defenses, especially one based on the advanced technologies that are now available. To the contrary, the development of such a system by the United States would almost certainly exercise a deterrent effect on states now thinking of spending lavishly on missiles, the costs of which would soon come to outweigh any likely strategic benefits.

As for Russia, the possibility exists of striking a new strategic balance with that country, one resting on a mix of offensive and defensive weapons. The right mix would leave Moscow with sufficient offensive forces to retain a reliable deterrent, while at the same time allowing the U.S. to protect itself against accidental or unauthorized launches from Russian territory. It would also give the U.S. sufficient defensive capabilities to address both China's newfound strategic arsenal and the developing world's growing appetite for nuclear-tipped missiles.

This is strategic thinking for a new strategic era. So far, however, such thinking has not made a dent on the Clinton administration and congressional Democrats still in love with the ABM treaty. And unfortunately, Republicans, too, have refrained from embracing it. Indeed, the paradoxical attraction of missile defense to some conservatives and Republicans was that it did not seem to *need* to be presented as part of a coherent strategy. Rather, it looked like a sure-fire, stand-alone winner, the one foreign-policy issue that could be expected to "resonate" with Americans who might not understand why they should care about what was happening in Bosnia or even in China but who would surely be galvanized by the prospect of a missile striking Alaska or Los Angeles. In short, support for missile defense was seen by some conservatives as compatible with a minimalist approach to foreign policy in general, a cover behind which the United States could safely withdraw from international engagement.

This political calculus has proved erroneous. In the absence of a coherent strategy, missile defense has turned out to be yet another casualty of the same bipartisan budget-cutting impulse that, although arising from different motives in the case of the two parties, has resulted in driving down defense allocations as a whole in every year since the end of the cold war. Within the Republican-controlled Congress, a new breed of "deficit hawks," led by John Kasich, has consistently worked against efforts to increase military spending above the insufficient amounts proposed by the Clinton administration. At the crucial moment in 1995, it was Kasich who led two dozen Republicans to defect on the missile-defense plank of the "Contract with America."

By the end of Clinton's second term, less money will be spent on missile defenses than at any time since 1986. This means that we will be unable to procure the defenses currently under development by the Clinton administration itself, much less those we actually need. Such is the potentially disastrous fate of a program that, for lack of strategic vision, has become just another more or less expendable budget item.

For the Clinton administration and liberals generally, the day is fast approaching when a choice will have to be made between a rigid commitment to the ABM treaty and any notion of the United States as the world's "indispensable nation." Conservatives, at least those who still believe in American global leadership, need face no such choice. As Ronald Reagan envisioned it, missile defense was not a means of reducing America's involvement in the world but was, rather, the vital shield that would free the United States to play its leading role, undeterred by the threat of nuclear annihilation or of attack by rogue states. That is still the best argument for missile defense, the necessary underpinning of an international order that can at once serve American interests and conduce to the spread of American ideals.

* Even though the ABM treaty does not cover theater-level antimissile systems, it does prohibit giving such systems a strategic "capability." But effective theater defenses will inevitably have *some* capability against strategic missiles. Arguably, the U.S. could exploit ambiguities in the treaty to build such advanced systems; but doing so would put us in the odd position of imitating the sorts of practices we rightly complained about when the Soviets engaged in them.

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Southern Comforts

Midge Decter

BACK IN the late 1960's, before any of us really understood how decisively our literary and intellectual world would soon be breaking apart, Willie Morris came to be both my boss and my playmate.

Willie was a boy out of Mississippi by way of the University of Texas and Oxford University in England, where, like our current President, he had been a Rhodes scholar. When I first met him, he had only recently come from working on a small Texas magazine to the city he never ceased to call the "Big Cave," where, virtually before he had set foot in the place, he found himself named the editor of *Harper's* magazine.

This may have set some kind of record for career upward mobility—at least in those days—but it was not really surprising, for at the time a very large number of major editorships in New York, including the managing editorship of the *New York Times*, happened to be in the hands of Southerners. Nor did this seem to be a mere coincidence: it was as if the romance of defeat that had for so long pervaded the South's local literary culture had all at once been transmuted into some kind of newly energized determination to soar.

Anyway, at the time of Willie's ascension, I was holding down a very peculiar job in the company then known as Columbia Records. I was not having a bad time exactly, but I kept wondering what the people who were signing my paychecks actually had in mind for me to be doing. And just as my puzzlement was becoming seriously uncomfortable, Willie called and asked me to come work for him. It took me three seconds to say yes.

His hiring me, as I understood, was part of a general campaign to hang out an "Under New Management" sign at *Harper's* as quickly as possible. Naturally, many of the old hands at the magazine were less than overjoyed at finding themselves under the authority of a man only slightly more than half their age and one, moreover, who could not quite conceal his disdain for their rather fusty literary tastes. One by one, with the very happy exception of Robert Kotlowitz, who had been and continued to be the managing editor, they retired.

In addition to me, Willie brought in two "contributing editors" who were in essence staff writers: a young Pulitzer-prize-winning journalist named David Halberstam, who had just quit the *New York Times* over some grievance, and a Texas buddy of Willie's named Larry L. King, who would one day make himself rich and famous with a piece of journalism that would become the basis for both a Broadway show and a movie called *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*. Somewhat later, the staff was joined by yet another refugee from the *New York Times*, John Corry; by virtue of his sense of life and

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his relation to the world around him, Corry, like me, was a premature neoconservative—a fact about himself it would take him a few more years to discover than it took me.

So there we were, Willie's people, now including Bob Kotlowitz, whom we all came to love, and for a while anyway the good times were rolling for fair.

One aspect of the good times was the fact that, all in all, Willie was an author's editor. Just about anyone who wrote well could seduce him, literarily speaking, and many who did not write that well but had some kind of ear for the music of language could at least get to first base. It would be right to say of Willie, as I think probably of no other editor then working in the Big Cave, that for him a beautiful sentence trumped the right attitude every time. He was a devotee of what, in the boyhood accent that had not been the least bit attenuated by his years in Texas and Oxford—and later New York—he spoke of as "fahn writin'." And the point is, he really knew what that was.

So his magazine was on the whole a very comforting place for its contributors and hence an extremely cheery one for its editors. For the rest, there was a lot of hard work followed by fun and games, including the consumption of a good deal of alcohol, after-hours gossip, and much horsing around, Southern-style. Along with the telling of tales, some of them pretty tall and all of them funny, horsing around Southern-style seemed to entail the plotting of a whole variety of none too pleasant practical jokes, several of which were actually carried out. Thus, though he was a generous spirit, playing with Willie could sometimes be no fit recreation for the soft-hearted.

I have always thought that Willie's particular romance with writing was a special inheritance from Mississippi. To be sure, in the early postwar years writers from all over the South had been involved in a literary explosion, whose effect was bound to be felt by any young literary would-be. But Mississippi had been the mother lode of William Faulkner, that most territorial of all the modern gods of literature, and to a boy born there with any ear for words and an eye for the life around him, Mississippi must have seemed more like a fate than a mere birthplace.

Whatever the reason for it, in Willie Morris's *Harper's*, writers as a class were courted, nourished, and given latitude, and the result was that the magazine quickly became known in the parlance of the trade as a "hot book." To anyone unfamiliar with the world of magazines, such a designation might be thought to suggest financial success; but it rarely does, and in this Willie's *Harper's* was no exception. The reputation of a magazine depends, rather, on the buzz it creates in the literary-journalistic world, and a "hot book" is one to which already established writers are pleased to contribute and which by the same token has the power to confer success on the as-yet unknown. Repute in the magazine business is thus a kind of circular process, and Willie was then at its center, all awhirl, half pretending to be, and half being, a bedazzled country boy.

In addition to being "hot," *Harper's* happened also to be the oldest continuously published magazine in the country. Thus Willie was also able to feel—something clearly very important to him—that what he was doing was in some way of a piece with America. Indeed, he would often wax romantic about being part of American history. This was not hubris—quite the contrary—but it led to certain gestures that must have been a puzzle to those who did not know him well. I remember being with him once on a mission to Provincetown, Massachusetts, where we were to collect from Norman Mailer the manuscript of a book-length article that would ultimately be known as *The Armies of the Night*. We were going to be devoting an entire issue of the magazine to this piece about the 1968 anti-Vietnam-war march on Washington—it was published in *Harper's* under the title, "The Steps of the Pentagon"—and to do so required our receiving the manuscript, as it were, straight from the typewriter.

Just before we left to return to New York, Mailer took us around Provincetown, which Willie had never seen. We drove out to the tip of Cape Cod, Mailer explaining how the Pilgrims had originally arrived here but felt it was too desolate and so sailed on to Plymouth. For years afterward, Willie did not stop talking about this moment, and he wrote about it as well: how a boy from Yazoo City, Mississippi, had been taken by a Jew from Brooklyn to see the spot where the Pilgrims had almost landed. O my America, my new-found land!

Willie's preoccupation with his place in the larger scheme of things, then, contained a considerable taste for melodrama. But it was also very real to him. And like his romance with and about writing, the need to place himself in historic context seemed to me then, and seems even more to me now, a very Southern condition.

We Northerners are, after all, such a motley crew, and for us collectively there are so many American histories, each commencing at a differ-

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ent period, that "placing" ourselves in this way is an unfamiliar exercise; perhaps even the descendants of the Boston Brahmins no longer engage in it. But born-and-bred Southern men—at least the ones I have known—seem preoccupied with the American past to an inordinate degree, perhaps precisely because they still have not made their inner settlement with it. And since the time I am writing about was also the time when the South was being decisively shaken up by the civil-rights movement, the Southerners' ambivalence must if anything have become even more intense. (I do not speak of Southern women. Women almost never exist in that kind of near-mystical relation to their birthplace.)

I have said Willie was my playmate; not mine alone, of course, because, in those days anyway, he was a man perpetually in need of company—preferably a gang, and preferably over beer. And that is how I got to know the people who have remained in my mind ever since as the "Southern Boys." They were Willie's old friends from here and there. A couple of them wrote for us. All of them visited our office whenever they came to town, which was fairly often, and they were also then involved in the after-work beer sessions at which Willie held court in a nearby Chinese restaurant. I think they continued to make Willie feel more at ease than he ever came to feel in literary New York, despite his years of importance and high connection in literary society there. And indeed, after some travail—travail being something at which Willie was not much good—he would all too soon leave *Harper's* and then, after a while, up and leave the North altogether and return to Mississippi, where he has remained ever since.

IT WAS easy to see why someone, especially a compatriot settled in the North like Willie, might come to depend on the society of the Southern Boys. They could be so relentlessly informal, so willfully without pretense, so insistently lacking in urbanity, that sometimes you might imagine they had just been sitting on the porch of a country store making fun of the city slickers driving by. What better company in which to grow a little sloppy on beer and contemplate life?

The role they played was all nonsense, of course; none of them was the "good ol' boy" he pretended to be. Still, they seemed to find the pretense useful. For one thing, it helped mask a kind of lurking, peculiarly Southern, ill humor, the kind that could appear one moment as teasing comradeship and the next moment as menace. With the Southern Boys, the latter never led to actual violence, but violence could be *threatened* at the drop of a hat.

Speaking of beer, in my experience most drunks sooner or later become aggressive, if not aggressively hostile then aggressively boring or aggressively sentimental, and frequently a combination of the three. But the drunkenness of the Southern Boys was profoundly interesting to me, especially as the need to go home and feed my family protected me from having to witness too many scenes of their ever-pantomimed but nevertheless extremely convincing truculence. Aside from the fact that I truly relished their company, one of the reasons for my special interest was that hanging out with them taught me something of great value that I might otherwise have never had any way of knowing.

What they taught me to see was that the blacks who were my neighbors and near-neighbors on the Upper West Side of Manhattan were not in fact members of a separate and distinct culture, as in those years they themselves were coming ever more vociferously to claim. On the contrary, I now understood that most blacks in Northern cities were primarily still children of the South. They were Southerners who had taken an unremitting centuries'-long beating from their white compatriots, but they were Southerners nonetheless. Which, when you come to think about it, should hardly be surprising: culture is after all a very sticky substance.

Among the ways that many Northern blacks still evince the Southern influence I would include a certain much-remarked-upon carelessness among the men about responsibilities and obligations and promises; a certain ironclad sense of life among the women; a special responsiveness to a sheer cascade of words and sounds, whether from preacher or poet or "rap artist"; and a tendency to sudden-onset surliness that has about it nothing so much as the air of people quitting before they are fired.

I once experienced an extraordinary confirmation of the notion that Northern blacks and Southern whites are very often a case of deep calling unto deep. One evening Ralph Ellison, perhaps in his time the most distinguished of all black writers, was for some reason I cannot remember meeting with Willie and me in Willie's apartment. Presumably we were trying to seduce him into writing something for the magazine. I had known Ralph, though not well, for a long time: he and I would frequently find ourselves at the same literary party and exchange distant hellos. In dress and bearing he was an extremely elegant man, and a rather prickly one, inclined to stiffen at things spoken in his hearing that somehow displeased him. Indeed, he managed

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to make it clear that much in this world was not up to his standard, and I once actually heard him declare, in answer to something said: "As for me, I happen to have values."

And here was this persnickety man, standing in Willie's living room, being transformed before my eyes by an unspoken exchange between him and the boy from Mississippi. His voice softened, the gestures of his face and hands softened, his very body seemed to turn pliant. He was actually . . . joshing. And Willie, too, was doing something I had never seen him do in the presence of an admired author: he was being *kind*. Ellison had grown up in Oklahoma, which is not, I know, Deep South; but Southern enough in its way. And I thought: though they are not friends and never could be—Willie certainly not being Ralph's cup of tea—and though all three of us are members of the same literary community, these two have some connection with each other that neither could ever have with me.

As for Southern-style surliness—a quality of which even the distinguished Ralph Ellison was not always entirely free—my buddies could certainly not be said to have evinced any instinctual readiness for being fired. They had, after all, reached the higher levels of social and professional ambition. Moreover, as I have said, their mode of being surly seldom resulted in anything more than a momentary *frisson* of threatened violence. Nevertheless, it was as hair-triggered as any of the true violence that is perpetually ready to break out on the street corners of a New York or Chicago slum.

Defeat must be what does this to the tempers of men. And more than a hundred years later, not so deeply buried as to withstand even the mildest assaults of alcohol, what had happened to the South at the hands of Grant and Sherman would rise to the lips of these true sons of Dixie. "We had the best men in the field," Willie late at night in his cups used to say over and over; "but our machines failed us." One was, moreover, required by the dictates of etiquette to take it as merely a bit of humor when a Southern acquaintance responded to a mention of the Civil War with the reminder that that conflict was more accurately known as "the War of the Northern Aggression," and one was required at the same time to acknowledge that this was at best not even half a joke.

WILLIE'S *Harper's*, "hot" though it may have been, was, for reasons of his own, brought to an end by its owner in the early 70's. Little by little, the old office gang was broken up. By today, of course, decades later, all those up-and-coming Southern Boys I used to have beer with have long since settled into whatever they were going to be. I have not seen them in years. But one thing about them on which I would be willing to bet something of large value is that all of them have remained men of the Left. They have been locked into that posture most of all by the imposition on them of a new kind of entanglement with America's blacks.

All their lives, to be sure, the Boys had been deeply bound up in the fortunes of black people. But the same civil-rights revolution that liberated Southern blacks from the oppressive thrall of Southern white men seems in some sense to have had the opposite effect on a decisive group of their former tormentors. To put it simply, the battle for civil rights that took place in the South was a dangerous struggle for the right and the good in which a group of Southern blacks acted with genuine heroism and, with only a couple of highly notable exceptions, the Southern Boys did not. Could educated, intelligent young Southerners at the time actually not have known where their duty lay? Of course they knew, but the combination of guilt and contempt they must all their lives have felt toward blacks no doubt made it impossible for them to participate outright in the action.

How they did ultimately respond to the death of Jim Crow was given expression in two separate ways, and unfortunately both turned out to be deeply influential. First, they staked their personal claim to decency by reminding us how much worse they could have been expected to be. Take the case of Tom Wicker, the former *New York Times* columnist and Southern liberal *par excellence*. In *A Time To Die* (1975), a memoir of his experience as a journalist during the famous riot at Attica prison in upstate New York in 1971, Wicker mused: "In 1946 [I] had made the great discovery that blacks were as human and individual as anyone. It was not much to learn, yet it was more than some people learn in a lifetime."

What Wicker was really saying here was that, given where and how he grew up, to have discovered that Negroes were human made him a better man than those who had never doubted the proposition in the first place. Whether or not, in the dark night of his own soul, Wicker really got away with this piece of moral grandstanding, his notion of a special virtue attaching to the Southern liberal was accepted with enthusiasm, and taken up in a variety of ways, by a whole host of his fellow Southerners.

The second response of the Southern Boys to the disruption of their old social habits was con-

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tained in a formulation that, despite being quite untrue, again turned out to be not only psychically soothing to them but fateful for everyone else. What they commenced to declare in the mid-1960's was that the experience of black people in the North was, in its own way, far *worse* than the experience of black people in the South. This claim, ridden for all it was worth, helped to create a whole new agenda for Northern civil-rights activists who had long been fighting the good fight in the courts—something it was, after all, possible to do in the bad old North—but had missed out on the defining experience of heroism that had been vouchsafed their Southern counterparts.

Thus was born the idea of *de-facto* segregation, now declared to be far more difficult to overcome than the *de-jure* segregation of Jim Crow. In the South, it was argued, blacks had always lived cheek-by-jowl with white folks, while in Northern cities they had been forced to remain isolated in ghettos, as poor as ever but faceless into the bargain. Moreover, simple legislation in the South was bringing about desegregation more rapidly than might have been imagined, while Northern blacks, already more segregated to begin with, were likely to remain so forever. Racism that was endemic, it was asserted, would prove to be far more difficult to root out than racism imposed by law.*

Whatever relief this falsehood about the relatively more intractable racism of the North brought to the consciences of Southerners, it had a positively devastating influence on the course of Northern black activism. In particular, the thought that they suffered just as great a disadvantage as the sharecropping cousins they had left behind in the cotton fields and shanty towns of the South served psychologically to relieve Northern blacks of the need to shoulder responsibility for the improvement of their own social and economic condition. Thus, instead of fighting to reform the schools in which their children might acquire the skills to move upward and outward, they identified the problem of the schools as one of *de-facto* segregation, demanding first the racial integration of each and every classroom and, when that proved impossible to achieve, a revision of the curriculum to make it user-friendly to black children.

The result of the first of these demands was that school system after school system was distracted from the problems of pedagogy by the great national row over busing. The result of the second, which issued in the teaching of such things as black English, black "social studies," and so on, was that the hopes of whole generations of black children were sacrificed to the grievances of their elders. As for "black power," still another expression of the preoccupation with Northern racism, this meant, and still means, its exact opposite: not the pursuit of real power but a device for extracting hand-outs. The combined consequence of these misbegotten initiatives has been to add not to the sum of racial justice in American society but to the spread of an unearned cynicism on the part of the presumed beneficiaries and of an unearned sense of virtue on the part of their liberal "benefactors."

My old buddies, men of the Left though they were, would have had to be superhuman not to have regarded this unfolding drama with a shiver of satisfaction. Not that they would have wished to see blacks in trouble, or behaving self-destructively. But by means of a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, North and South had now been placed, racially speaking, on an equal footing. Once, a couple of the Southern Boys and I were riding in a taxi, and for the entire trip the cabbie, an Italian well on in years, inveighed most uninhibitedly against both the driving habits and the general demeanor and style of life of "*Nee*-groes." As we were leaving, one of my companions read him a stern lecture about what it was like to listen to such disgusting talk. But as we walked away he turned to us and said, in mock soul-weariness, "Oh, how I *despise* an amateur bigot."

It was a joke, and we all laughed. But, considering the record of subsequent racial unpleasantness in the North, I have often thought of how pleasing it must have been to my friend's liberal soul to be able to declare himself, over and over again, the righteous enemy of all that amateur bigotry.

THE SOUTH, it goes without saying, is no longer the Old South of Willie's and his friends' boyhood experience. Now it is even being advertised as nothing less than the American future. Clearly there has been a huge demographic shift in a southerly direction, brought about primarily by the growing population of retirees who seek the sun and have the means to find it, not to mention the transfer of many Northern industries to a region where there is still a supply of lower-

* There is no question that, at the time, blacks in Northern cities lived almost entirely segregated lives. This was, however, as much a result of economics as of bigotry—and, in New York City, of a now-forgotten irony. New York's postwar public housing was originally meant to be racially integrated; but blacks objected on the ground that they were more entitled than whites to this public benefit. The municipal housing authority was also originally required to keep its buildings free of people with criminal records, but that, too, was objected to as a form of racial injustice. Hence New York public housing has long been not only segregated but unsafe.

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wage, nonunion labor. These movements have meant new business and banking and foreign trade, which have in turn augmented the population still more. Obviously, a serious increase in population means, as well, a serious shift in the regional balance of political power.

A couple of years ago, Peter Applebome, who began reporting on the South in the 1970's and has for some time been the *New York Times* man in Atlanta, wrote a book called *Dixie Rising*. It is a city-by-city, state-by-state account of "how," in the words of its subtitle, "the South is shaping American values, politics, and culture." Applebome clearly loves the place, every inch of it, though (as he himself says) his 21 years as a sojourner have hardly counted to make him one of its true sons. The reporting in *Dixie Rising* is both vivid and interesting, and if the author's evidence for a Southern takeover of our national culture and politics seems less than convincing, that is not due to any lack of journalistic energy on his part. It is just hard to get over the sense that, except for some of the comforts of its climate, what Peter Applebome touts as new and rising in the new and rising South is little different from what he might find old and declining in the old and declining North.

Take the allegedly great new spread of Southern cultural influence. That influence can hardly be called new. On the contrary, the very elements that have so rapidly shifted economic and political power to the South are likely to *weaken* that cultural influence, leading precisely to the kind of homogenization that has already taken over the rest of the country. Industrialization and immigration do not, after all, encourage the kind of rootedness-in-place that accounts for the enduring special appeal of Southern literature. And as for country music, prominent among Applebome's examples of the spread of Southern taste throughout the country at large, here, too, a comparison of any of today's performances with those of the past must surely lead to the conclusion that the influence has all been in the opposite direction—toward, that is, a dilution of the Southernness of country music by the importation into it of the universalizing influence of rock.

The point is that in *Dixie Rising* Peter Applebome does not come clean. The explicit message of his book is that the South is now the up-and-coming America. Maybe that is so, though with the kind of technological onrush through which we are nowadays consigned to live, up-and-coming is a dime a dozen. But the real presence lurking beneath Applebome's reporting is not so much the new South as a kind of Tom Wickerish version of the old—that is, a place given to a certain smugness about its reclaimed humanity.

I DO not mean to belittle what the children of the Old South have been doing in recent years to undo the shame of their past. It cannot be easy, for in some cases the process of exposure and purgation may turn out to involve those near and dear—relatives, neighbors, colleagues. Just this past March, for example, Mississippi unsealed more than 124,000 pages of secret files belonging to an erstwhile state agency called the Sovereignty Commission. This agency had been given the job of preventing the success of the civil-rights movement, a task it carried out by means of such tactics as spying, intimidation, false imprisonment, and jury tampering. Among the files were to be found discussions of the possible use of violence, and though this particular discussion may never have been carried beyond the hypothetical by the Sovereignty Commission itself, certainly there was a great deal of violence, up to and including murder, and it could hardly be said that any agency of the state worked to put a stop to it. Mississippians, of course, knew all along about what was going on in their state, but now there are 124,000 pages of hard evidence for the world to lay its hands on.

At the time, the killing of the young activists Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney made the loudest of the nationwide noises about the state of play in Mississippi. But as far as real and lasting damage to the civil-rights movement is concerned, nothing was in the league of the 1964 assassination of Medgar Evers, chairman of the Mississippi NAACP. Evers, the most intelligent and, it has been said, noblest of the Southern leaders, was shot in the back as he stood in the driveway of his home in Jackson. His death was especially fateful because it was after he went down that the movement he served became radicalized and, in doing so, lost its sense of who its real friends and enemies were and what in the long run would actually best conduce to the welfare of its constituency.*

Twice, Evers's assassin, Byron De La Beckwith, was brought to trial, and twice, with the help of the Klan and, it now turns out, the Sovereignty Commission, he escaped with a hung jury. Then, in 1994, Bobby DeLaughter, an assistant district at-

* Nowadays people have forgotten that when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, the young radicals had already largely repudiated him. They were prepared to encourage riots as a memorial to him, but were—fatefully—no longer under his intellectual influence.

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torney, tried the aging De La Beckwith one more time. And this time he was found guilty.

WHICH BRINGS me back to Willie Morris. When Willie left the environs of the Big Cave, he went to live in Oxford, home of Ole Miss, where he had been invited to play the role of writer-in-residence. Now he lives in Jackson, where he happens to have been born and where as a little boy he had spent many summer idylls with his grandmother and grandfather, who worked in a potato-chip factory. In 1994 he watched the last, finally successful, trial of De La Beckwith, made the acquaintance of Bobby DeLaughter, and decided that the combined story of Evers, De La Beckwith, and DeLaughter would make a terrific movie. As he tells it in his new book, *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers*,* he urged his old friend, the producer Fred Zollo, to make the movie, and Zollo in turn persuaded Rob Reiner to direct it.

At one point in *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers*, Willie quotes Faulkner to the effect that if you want to understand the world, first you have to understand Mississippi. Perhaps on the strength of that idea, or perhaps because the notion of a movie had originally been his, Willie was made an official adviser to the project. In addition to giving Reiner & Co. a special—and, if I remember my Willie, unsparingly romantic—tour of the Delta, he seems to have helped with finding locations and perhaps, though he does not mention it, with advice about how not to step on certain Mississippi toes. (Not surprisingly, as he tells it, some Mississippi authorities were not too happy about the prospect of having Evers's murder dredged up by Hollywood, especially after the bruising the place had taken in *Mississippi Burning*, the 1988 movie about the murder of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney.) But to judge by his own account, what Willie was mainly doing was hanging around in the way that had once given me so many hours of amusement, namely, as a companion, a teller of tales, and an organizer of practical jokes—in this case, it seems, mostly having to do with snakes.

The movie (screenplay by Lewis Collick) stars Alec Baldwin as DeLaughter, James Woods as De La Beckwith, and, in a rather odd and no doubt box-office-driven bit of casting, Whoopi Goldberg as Evers's widow Myrlie. When it was released, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, as it was called, was very badly received, and disappeared before I got around to seeing it. But the fate of the movie is anyway not of primary importance to Willie's real story. He obviously kept a day-by-day diary of the shooting (for which Reiner had been given, or perhaps had given himself, a deadline of 61 days), and he provides portraits of the three stars as well as a considerably detailed and characteristically sentimental account of how the director and the members of the technical staff went about their respective business. If you know Willie, all of this is interesting, but if you do not, it might well fall into the category of "Who cares?"

Finally, however, the book's most affecting presence is its ghost. Which is not Medgar Evers, not by a long shot: Willie did not know him, nor is he haunted by him. Moreover, Evers does not really figure in the movie, which is primarily the story of the conflict between an assistant district attorney and a long-protected murderer whom he at last brings to justice. Willie tells us that Myrlie Evers, who after some reluctance had agreed to cooperate with Rob Reiner, was in the end displeased by the movie, and it is not hard to figure out why, if what she had hoped for was some kind of tribute to her dead husband. Even in *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers*, the role played by Evers is the same role played by the Pilgrims in Willie's account of our drive around Provincetown: a foil for his desire to find himself engaged in some profoundly moving relation to a piece of history.

No, the real ghost in the book is that damnable Old kudzu-covered South, which declines any longer to defend itself and yet will not go away and cease to be an embarrassment to its loving sons. There is, for example, much old-style mystical talk in the book about Mississippi, its extraordinary riches and poverty, its beauty and its tragedy, its "brooding sadness" and its "physical power"—the kind of rhetoric a certain Yankee wag of my acquaintance used to call "Faulkner and water."

Such talk is as indispensable a part of the sensibility of Willie Morris as the English language itself. Yet he is at the same time constantly driven by a need to express his racial enlightenment. Thus, offering a by-the-way observation concerning Spike Lee's movie about Malcolm X, he must refer to Lee as "my fellow Southerner" and suggest that Lee's difficulties in getting funding had to do with Hollywood's prejudice against blacks. Evidently, Willie has not been to many movies lately, or paid much attention to the professional fortunes of this particular fellow Southerner.

In aid of his predictable Southern Boy's claim that race relations are better in the South than in the North, Willie also seems to take satisfaction in

* Random House, 288 pp., $23.00.

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mentioning the names of Rodney King and O.J. Simpson in the same sentence, as if the two cases had anything in common or said anything about North versus South—and also as if both of these gentlemen were not nowadays pursuing their accustomed entertainments in Los Angeles. It could of course be said that O. J. Simpson's freedom is the result of racism—but hardly of the kind intended by this loyal son of Mississippi.

Willie Morris is, after all, a decent man, and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his feelings of friendship for blacks, or the validity of his belief that the South is not the place it once was. For of course it is not the place it once was. But the idea—an idea expressed more than once in Willie's book—that the North is more racist than the South is not only untrue, it has proved a very rickety political and cultural crutch for all too many black leaders and perhaps an even more rickety one for my former good buddies.

In the case of black leaders, this idea has served as an alibi for their own failure to work at remoralizing those downcast members of their community whose very lives have been given in forfeit to the deadly game of victimhood. Meanwhile, for Willie and his old gang, accusing the North of a greater criminality than the South's has made it possible for them to shift at virtually a moment's notice from looking down on blacks to not seeing them at all. For it is no less dismissive of someone's humanity to offer him blanket sympathy regardless of who he most particularly is, and what he might most particularly have done, than it is to oppress him for the color of his skin. The god they always refer to as "Mr." Faulkner, if he were able, would surely tell Willie, and Tom Wicker, and Peter Applebome, and all the other liberal members of my old gang of Southern Boys that to lose sight of the particular—whether North, South, East, West, black, white, guilty, innocent, or in-between—is to fail both oneself and the truth needed for serious literature and serious morality at once.

It may take another generation until American blacks learn to dispense with all the blind and uncaring sympathy that liberals have used to cosset and at the same time ignore them. It will probably take easily as long for the Old South to become the truly New. There is no question that in some ways this development will entail a loss; but it is a loss the United States would immeasurably benefit from sustaining. As for Willie, my loving editor and terrific playmate, some long-ago childhood part of me has always wished that I had not had to move away from him and his Boys. Nobody I have ever known was randier for the heady pleasures of a beautiful sentence and a hot sentiment. These are admittedly mere baubles, but oh what fun it was to wallow in that old Southern swamp when one wanted to play hooky from a complicated and demanding world.

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The Contradictions of A. J. Heschel

Jon D. Levenson

If there were a category among serious religious thinkers akin to what is known in the classical-music world as a crossover artist, pride of place in it would surely go to Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-72). One of the most extraordinary Jews of the 20th century, Heschel was born in Warsaw as the son of a hasidic *rebbe*, acquired a philosophical and theological education in Germany, became a Yiddish poet of some note, survived the Nazi obliteration of the several worlds of his youth and young manhood, and became the most influential and widely read Jewish theologian in America.

In the quarter-century since his death, Heschel's reputation has grown geometrically. Today, his many books on spiritual life are read by a wide variety of Jews—and Christians, too. Indeed, something of a personality cult now envelops the Heschel name. Not only is he revered as an inspirational writer but, thanks to his participation in the civil-rights movement of the 1960's and to his high-profile immersion in liberal politics, his name is now regularly invoked in support of a wide spectrum of contemporary causes, from religious pluralism to feminism and environmentalism.

The recent 25th anniversary of Heschel's death has occasioned a number of tributes and evaluations, among them the first volume of a projected two-volume biography by Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner.* The foundation for this particular work lies in an archive assembled by Rabbi Dresner, a long-time disciple of Heschel's, while the actual writing has been done by Kaplan, a professor of comparative literature at Brandeis who knew Heschel in the last six years of his life. Although limited to the period from his birth until his arrival in America, and hardly free of the sentimental and hagiographic tone that the Heschel mystique too often elicits, the book offers an occasion to reflect on his larger legacy.

Given Heschel's own reticence about his childhood, and given the ravages of the Holocaust, the earliest phases of his life are the hardest to reconstruct, and Kaplan and Dresner's account depends heavily on anecdote. Descended on both his father's and his mother's side from founding figures of East European Hasidism, Abraham Joshua Heschel was named after a distinguished ancestor known as the Apter Rav. Especially after his father's untimely death in 1916, the young Heschel came under the influence of his maternal uncle, a man of all-consuming piety who later directed him to the Kotzker branch of Hasidism. This severe and perfectionist school emphasized

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* *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness.* Yale, 402 pp., $35.00.

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self-abasement and contrition, and it was to his education in its ways that Heschel later attributed what he called his "inferiority complexes."

Ordained as a rabbi at the tender age of sixteen, Heschel seemed destined to follow in the footsteps of his distinguished forebears. But something—it is unclear exactly what—upset or at least diverted the momentum of his religious and cultural traditionalism, and soon he was dreaming of a university education. With the aid of some sympathetic elders, he hired tutors for himself in Polish, Latin, and German, camouflaging what he was doing from his mother by "chant[ing] his Polish declensions and other books in a distant room, as if he were studying Talmud."

Two years after receiving his ordination, Heschel left Warsaw for Vilna. There he enrolled in a secular Jewish *gymnasium* where the instruction was in Yiddish, the student body coeducational, the curriculum Western and scientific, and the pedagogy progressive. To prepare himself for the role of a typical European student, the young hasidic rabbi transformed himself physically; by the time he arrived in Vilna, Kaplan and Dresner tell us, he "was clean-shaven, without earlocks."

The break in Heschel's world view was not quite so decisive as the break in his appearance. While the political and cultural atmosphere in the *gymnasium* was avant-garde and humanistic, a fellow student remembers Heschel as a "person of an entirely different type than we," still very much the traditional Talmud scholar amid a company of modern skeptics. Even when he joined the group of left-wing Yiddish writers and artists known collectively as "Young Vilna"—he later claimed to have been a co-founder of this movement, a claim Kaplan and Dresner label a "half-truth"—the poetry he wrote under its aegis betrayed a still deep-seated involvement in religious issues. "You will never be a great poet," his mentor, the Yiddish writer Moyshe Kulbak told him, "but you will become an excellent philosopher."

In 1927, having completed his preparation for higher studies, Heschel moved to Berlin. There, partly fulfilling Kulbak's expectations, he enrolled in both the philosophy and theology faculties at the University of Berlin, concentrating in the emerging fields of aesthetics, phenomenology, and psychology but working as well in art history and Semitic philology, especially the Bible. It was, paradoxically, in his choice of the last-named field that he showed just how far he had traveled from his East European origins, for at the University of Berlin the sacred text was approached under the direction of scholars of a liberal Protestant bent and according to the historical-critical methods developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. No less striking, from the traditionalist point of view, was Heschel's simultaneous enrollment in the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, a liberal seminary in Berlin where rabbis and scholars were trained in modern modes of textual and historical analysis.

Kaplan and Dresner write that Jews "in the hasidic prayer houses [in Berlin] became cool to Heschel when they learned" where he was studying. They themselves, as his advocates, defend his decision on the grounds that it showed independence of character. But to Heschel's hasidic critics, the problem may well have been that he was not being independent *enough*, allowing himself instead to be seduced by the approach to Jewish tradition that happened to prevail in the environment into which he appeared to be assimilating.

In fact, the picture is more complicated than either of these interpretations suggests. In those years, Berlin was a mecca for Jewish intellectuals committed to rethinking their religious heritage in light of the challenge presented by modern philosophical, historical, and scientific thought; the cast of characters in Kaplan and Dresner's chapters on Heschel's Berlin experience reads like a *Who's Who* of 20th-century Jewish thought. It includes Leo Baeck, the liberal theologian; Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, later to be the preeminent philosopher and talmudist of modern Orthodoxy; and Alexander Altmann, a polymath intellectual historian who after the war would become a leading light in Jewish studies in America.

As it happens, however, the greatest influence on Heschel was exerted not by any of these distinguished names but by the relatively little-known David Koigen, a political philosopher and social theorist whose life story anticipated Heschel's own and whose neo-hasidic thinking would deeply affect Heschel's emerging theology. In excerpts from the minutes of a private seminar that Heschel took with Koigen, included in Kaplan and Dresner's book, one can see foreshadowed the philosophy of Judaism that he would elaborate decades later.

Heschel finished his doctoral dissertation—on the phenomenology of consciousness among the biblical prophets—just as Hitler was achieving control over Germany. Though he had no aspirations as a congregational rabbi, he took a second ordination, this one from the liberal *Hochschule*.

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Precluded as a Jew from the university positions he craved, he supported himself through his writing (poetic and philosophical, popular and scholarly), editing, and teaching. Contact with Martin Buber in Frankfurt led to a theological correspondence and eventually to Heschel's appointment as Buber's successor at the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus*, an innovative institution of adult Jewish education.

But the gathering storm was unmistakable (even if almost no one, including Heschel, foresaw where it would eventually lead), and the last chapters of this book find its subject engaged in a frantic search for an academic position in Poland, Palestine, or the United States—anywhere outside the tightening grip of the Nazis. On October 28, 1938, two weeks before *Kristallnacht*, Gestapo agents entered Heschel's quarters in Frankfurt and took him to the police station. "The next morning," Kaplan and Dresner write, "he was crammed into a sealed and guarded train with hundreds of other Jews, standing all the way during the three-day journey to the German-Polish border."

Making his way to his family in Warsaw, Heschel next escaped to London, where his brother lived; the fact that "exit permits for his mother and sisters . . . were impossible to attain" left him "with an unhealable wound." Not long afterward, thanks to the tireless efforts of Julian Morgenstern, the president of Hebrew Union College—the Reform rabbinical institution in Cincinnati—Heschel came to the United States. This volume of his biography closes with his appointment there as an instructor in Bible.

Thus, the strange tale of one who, by the age of thirty-three, had already been a hasidic rabbi from Warsaw, a Yiddish poet from Vilna, a philosopher of religion from Berlin, and a Jewish educator from Frankfurt, and whose path in decades to come was destined to take stranger turns still.

SO UNUSUAL, and so little-known, are the episodes of Heschel's early life that this account is to be welcomed on that score alone. Like any biography assembled disproportionately from memoirs, however, especially memoirs of the subject himself or of his admirers, it leaves many enticing things unexplained. To give only one example, a footnote to Kaplan and Dresner's text, citing Heschel's niece as its source, enigmatically reports that he had a younger brother who died in the same epidemic that took his father's life in 1916. If that is true, one wonders why Heschel never spoke of it, and also what effect the death of this boy might have had on his own eventual estrangement from his family's religious orientation.

More puzzling still is the story told here of an Orthodox psychiatrist of distinguished hasidic lineage who visited Heschel's home in Warsaw and there helped "wean" the young man not only from the "tyrannical" Kotzker tutor to whom his uncle had entrusted his education but, more generally, from "his family's authority." For this tidbit the authors cite an interview with one of Heschel's cousins. They also laud the psychiatrist for his success in rescuing Heschel from his family's "parochial expectations without alienating him from their love and spiritual ideals."

Surely some further discussion was warranted here: rare indeed must have been the hasidic teenager in 1923 upon whom a psychiatrist paid a house call. Moreover, whether or not this particular psychiatrist is to be credited with "usher[ing] Heschel across the threshold" into secular studies, there also seems to have been an emotional issue involved, even a crisis of sorts in the young man's inner life; but as to its nature we are left guessing.

Part of the problem is that the authors of this biography, like Heschel himself in such works as *The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in East Europe* (1950), are wedded to a heavily idealized view of hasidic life. Resolutely ignoring questions of social structure, cultural context, and the distribution of power in actual hasidic communities, they fail to distinguish between the religious values of the Hasidim and lived historical reality. The mature Heschel at least had an excuse for this sort of thing: his genre was not historiography but theology and inspiration, and his goal was to transmit the essence of traditional Jewish spirituality to readers inhabiting a very different social situation. But when, indulging in a similar form of idealization, his biographers piously assert that "Heschel's father demonstrated in subtle ways reverence for each and every person," they make it that much more difficult to understand the sources of the young Heschel's (partial) disaffection from his family and its world.

The hagiographic impulse becomes even more pronounced when it comes to Heschel himself. Although Kaplan and Dresner do occasionally admit to their subject's human frailties (insecurity and excessive self-regard are mentioned), more often than not they put only the most positive spin on Heschel's actions, and rarely do they consider alternative explanations. Thus, we learn that, having "claimed to have read most—if not all—of his father's books by age ten or twelve," the young Heschel "shocked his brother, Jacob, by boasting that he could write better ones himself." The au-

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thors' comment: "Already, it seems, Heschel let slip a personal voice seeking expression." Different terms spring to mind for this sort of behavior.

On the other hand, Kaplan and Dresner perform a real service in tracing Heschel's developing religious ideas as they are reflected in his poems as well as in his early correspondence and scholarly works. As they correctly note, the keystone of Heschel's philosophy, adumbrated in his studies with David Koigen and later to be expounded in such works as *Man Is Not Alone* (1951) and *God in Search of Man* (1955), was and would remain the idea of the living God, the God Who reveals Himself in inward experience and intuition and Who can be reached through "the subtle modalities of emotion" even by individuals who stand outside a religious community.

In developing this conception of God, Heschel was working explicitly against another philosophical view, very characteristic of modernity, according to which God is to be understood as a human ideal, and religion as (in Heschel's own words) "a fiction, useful to society or to man's personal well-being." In rejecting this view, which he dubbed "symbolism," Heschel was also rejecting anthropocentrism. For him, the central reality of existence, as his biographers put it, was that God "is the *Subject*, while human beings are *objects* of divine awareness." Man's will, the formidable capacities of his intellect, are subordinate to something prior—something pre-conceptual, pre-symbolic, and pre-verbal: the personal concern of the ineffable and holy God for human beings and for His creation.

In these early statements of Heschel's theology, one cannot but detect the return of powerful pieces of the hasidic piety of his origins, only now couched in the language of Western thought and pitched to a Western social and religious environment. To the day he died, he continued to challenge both liberal religion and the self-centeredness of modern secularity with this profoundly theocentric view.

Unfortunately, despite their useful sketch of his ideas, Heschel's biographers slight both the context in which those ideas developed and the real difficulties they entail. In their account of his doctoral dissertation, for example, Kaplan and Dresner refer to the "potentially devastating critique of institutional religion" contained in Heschel's strong preference for the biblical prophet, a figure committed to social justice and "overwhelmed by the Word that arrives at God's initiative," over the biblical priest with his involvement in the details of law and ritual. What they do *not* note is that this preference—based in any case on a very dubious dichotomy between prophet and priest—was a staple of Protestant biblical studies and was, moreover, often linked to anti-Jewish (and anti-Catholic) polemics. Heschel's "critique," in other words, devastated more than just "institutional religion."

Was Heschel himself aware of the conflict between the Protestant world view within which he pursued his doctoral studies and the traditional Judaism that he continued to practice meticulously? And is it an accident that his books would later be so popular among liberal Christian scholars and theologians? For many, he became (and remains) the rabbi they love to quote, and some connection between this fact and his deep absorption of Protestant values in Berlin seems obvious. Unfortunately, not a word about this appears in *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*.

Other, related questions similarly obtrude. Heschel later claimed that during his sojourn in the *gymnasium* and among the writers and artists of Vilna, he discovered "many secularist Jews who lived the life of saints and did not know it!" His biographers faithfully cite this sentiment as an instance of their hero's amazing ability to "reconcile" the various worlds in which he traveled—in this case, the world of "his hasidic past with secular Jewish activism."

But the world of Heschel's "hasidic past," whatever its particular emotional tonalities, was grounded above all in a scrupulous adherence to Jewish religious law. Long after he physically left that world, moreover, he himself continued to conduct his life as a highly traditional, observant Jew. How does one—how did *he*—"reconcile" this with secularism, however "saintly"? For it is all well and good to speak warmly of the "prophetic" thirst for justice as an essential dimension of the Jewish legacy. But if, for Heschel, "divine revelation validated Jewish law," as his biographers insist, then surely no secular definition of justice could ever have sufficed for him. Instead of invoking the idea of a reconciliation between Hasidism and secular activism—an impossibility, as it happens—his biographers would have done better to explore what exactly was lost and what exactly was gained as Heschel shuttled among his various worlds, and especially how he dealt, or failed to deal, with the losses.

The question of the authority of *halakhah*, traditional rabbinic law in all its specificity, is the most obvious point of division between the traditionalist

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world of Heschel's origins and Jewish secular modernity. But it is, or should be, a no less troubling point of division between the world he grew up in, and whose basic religious dictates he continued to follow, and the world of religious but non-Orthodox Judaism in which he spent his entire professional life both in Germany and later in the United States. (After staying five years at Hebrew Union College, he moved to New York and spent the remainder of his life at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary.) How are we to reconcile *that* particular set of dualities, which raise their own version of the prophet/priest dichotomy?

In Heschel's time, the "prophetic" critique of *halakhah* within Judaism itself was perhaps not so salient as it has become since his death; one could, as he did, focus on issues of meaning and personal motivation in religious life while being vague about which specific practices, ultimately, the motivation was *for*. But one cannot help wondering how he would have reacted had he lived to see the notions of prophetic justice and righteousness disengaged from the biblical ethic in which they arose and brought to bear directly against the *halakhah* itself—as, for example, in the contemporary demand in some religious Jewish circles for the normalization of homosexual behavior. Presented with a hard and unavoidable choice, with which of his worlds would Heschel have taken his stand?

SUCH QUESTIONS are perhaps impossible to answer. But they are also indispensable to any honest assessment of Heschel's achievement. For the truth is that it was not out of the reconciliation but out of the *collision* of the several worlds in which he traveled that his most profound reflections on Jewish theology and spirituality were born.

At times incoherent or self-contradictory, Heschel's works also show a deep grasp of, and an uncanny ability to articulate, some of the most agonizing questions of human existence, and are capable of soaring to heights of religious apprehension with a captivating and almost rhapsodic fervor. The deficiencies in his thinking are undeniable and his failure or unwillingness to reconcile his worlds may, indeed, be what has rendered much of his thought susceptible of appropriation by so wide a variety of opposing tendencies—traditionalist and modern, nonobservant and observant, Christian and Jewish. And yet his central, rock-solid intuition of the living God continues to be as relevant to the sunken modern condition—and as vital a reproof to anthropocentric religion—as on the day he first formulated it. And this, together with the magnetism of his personal example (to which Kaplan and Dresner eloquently witness), ensures that Heschel will continue to matter. One can only hope that both his work and his life will come to be appreciated in all their nuance and complexity.

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Is Labor Back?

Arch Puddington

THIS PAST March, the federal government published statistics that could hardly have come as welcome news to organized labor. Despite seven years of economic expansion and a drop in unemployment to the lowest level in decades, union membership in the United States has continued to decline in both relative and absolute terms. If, in the mid-1950's, 35 percent of workers (and over 50 percent in the major industrial states) were enrolled in unions, by 1997 the overall number had fallen to a mere 14 percent. In the private sector, the shrinkage has been particularly acute; unions today represent only 10 percent of workers not on the government payroll.

These numbers must be especially embarrassing for the current leadership of the AFL-CIO, which came into office promising to reverse a long downward trend. It was, in fact, discontent over labor's eroding base that led to John J. Sweeney's election as AFL-CIO president in October 1995. Though a member in good standing of the labor establishment, Sweeney had campaigned for office as an insurgent, depicting his predecessor, Lane Kirkland, as stodgy, unimaginative, and incapable of bringing in fresh blood or of energizing the rank and file. Crusading for office under the slogan "America needs a raise," Sweeney promised a labor movement that would be more dynamic, more creative, more open to women and minority groups, more aggressive in pursuing its political objectives, and more confrontational in its relations with management.

Once at the helm, Sweeney did indeed begin immediately to shift the AFL-CIO into a more combative stance, and, after almost three years, he can point to several interim achievements. In the 1996 national elections, the AFL-CIO entered the political arena with a vigorous campaign, spending $25 million of its members' dues in an advertising blitz that helped Democratic candidates ride to victory in a number of key races. Labor has also flexed its muscles on Capitol Hill, working to defeat legislation that would have given President Clinton authority to negotiate trade agreements with foreign countries on a "fast track." At the factory gate, the Teamsters union, an AFL-CIO affiliate, organized a strike last summer against United Parcel Service, forcing one of America's most powerful companies to make significant concessions at the bargaining table. And last year the AFL-CIO also launched an ambitious organizing drive, managing to induct 350,000 new members.

All told, Sweeney has thus gone some distance in reshaping the AFL-CIO's image and even in beefing up its ranks, if hardly in sufficient numbers to offset ongoing losses. He has also won a new respect for organized labor among certain constituencies—primarily Democratic-party activists

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and radical academics—that had previously spoken of it only in derisive tones.

Yet despite these accomplishments, the new leadership has made little progress in solving the more fundamental problem of trade unionism's declining significance in American life. Not only has membership fallen off, but unions have been nearly invisible in the ongoing national discussion of such workplace issues as "flextime," maternity leave, and the like. Nor do American policy-makers take seriously the various protectionist schemes of tariffs and import controls that have been elaborated by labor's professional economists. To make matters still worse, as the new AFL-CIO leadership moves to discard labor's traditional independence in favor of an open alliance with the Democratic party and various liberal-Left groups, it may, if anything, end up exacerbating the movement's predicament.

OF THE factors that lurk behind the steady contraction of labor's ranks, a number are admittedly beyond the control of the AFL-CIO. Perhaps the most important is the process of "deindustrialization" that, beginning in the 1960's, has transformed the shape of the American economy through the simultaneous pressures of global competition and technological innovation. Factory after factory in the nation's industrial belt—and precisely in those industries where organized labor once enjoyed its greatest strength—has either reduced output, closed, moved to the nonunionized South, or relocated abroad. A toll has also been taken by the deregulation of key industries like trucking and aviation, a process that has opened up competition between union and nonunion enterprises and put the former, hamstrung by restrictive work rules and higher salaries, at a decided disadvantage.

Still other factors contributing to labor's decline include aggressive efforts on the part of corporations to keep unions from organizing nonunion shops. In some sectors, management has also fared surprisingly well in campaigns to have existing unions "decertified" by workers themselves. In addition, the Reagan administration compounded labor's woes in the 1980's through pro-management appointments to the National Labor Relations Board. And when Reagan dismissed air-traffic controllers *en masse* in 1981, after their union struck in violation of federal law, the effect on labor-management relations over the next decade was incalculable.

The cumulative impact of these trends, plus others of labor's own devising, has helped place the movement in its current institutional bind. Although labor spokesmen naturally tend to focus on Reaganite conservatism and corporate "greed" as the sole causes of their difficulties, the truth is that neither can fairly be held responsible. Free trade and American participation in the global economy are somewhat likelier culprits, but for decades these have enjoyed consistent backing in both the Republican and Democratic parties. In recent years, deregulation, too, has had strong bipartisan support.

One thing that really *has* rendered many traditional trade-union functions superfluous is the explosion of federal workplace rules. Union membership is supposed to confer certain benefits, but it has become harder to say what those benefits are. As federal bureaucracies have added layers of regulations governing every aspect of the workplace, from the rights of dismissed workers to safety and health and sexual harassment, the special protections once afforded by unions and symbolized by the shop steward have come to matter less and less. But there is a great irony here. The very type of governmental expansion that has led to the marginalization of the unions' role is something that the AFL-CIO has not only long supported, but proudly claims credit for. Here is truly a case of being hoist by one's own petard.

IF ORGANIZED labor's explanation for its straitened circumstances is decidedly less than satisfactory, the prospects for deliverance from its woes are also quite doubtful, notwithstanding the short-term victories to which I have already pointed. Some of the organization's most highly publicized membership drives, for example, have taken place in low-wage industries with transient employees: strawberry workers in California, casino employees in Las Vegas. These can hardly serve as replacements for the once-stable base composed of highly paid steelworkers, automobile workers, and long-haul truckers.

Similarly, although AFL-CIO officials comfort themselves with gains in membership among civil servants, here too serious problems loom. A new generation of fiscally conservative governors and mayors has set out to reduce the role of government and the size of its workforce, and by and large these officials do not enjoy close relations with local union establishments. More often than not, indeed, they regard unions as impediments to reform. Seeking ways to reduce the cost of government services, they increasingly look to privatization schemes that turn decision-making power over

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to employers less constrained than municipal governments in resisting union demands.

Some areas do offer limited potential. Health care has been expanding rapidly, and (unlike steel mills or knitting factories) hospitals and clinics do not have the option of closing up shop and moving their operations to Guatemala. A number of AFL-CIO affiliates are already preparing drives to enlist a broad range of medical personnel, from hospital orderlies to doctors. But the health-care industry is itself under tremendous pressure to curtail costs, and growth in this sector cannot possibly be counted on to offset the overall decline in union membership.

It is, in fact, difficult to envision *any* sort of organizing strategy that would enable the unions at this late date to stem the deterioration of their base. Sweeney and other leaders may invoke the spirit of the 1930's and a bygone age of successful militancy. Yet conditions today do not remotely resemble those prevailing during the Great Depression. Joblessness is low, and the distress of those who suffer from it is cushioned by unemployment compensation and other welfare measures. And while times can be harsh for the unskilled, Americans with an education or a particular trade can often look forward to a wide range of career opportunities in fields where unions simply do not exist. Finally, unions in the old days were often aided by the ham-fisted policies of management; today, a supervisor who invites unionization by mistreating his employees is regarded as a failure and is dismissed.

Labor's inability to find new members is precisely the reason it has been turning more and more to politics in order to pursue its objectives. That is, the efforts to influence election campaigns and lobby government serve as a means of achieving through the ballot box and legislation what can no longer be obtained by sheer weight of numbers and collective bargaining. And this in turn suggests that the militant mood of the AFL-CIO is no passing phenomenon, and that its turn toward greater and more openly partisan political engagement will be pursued with ever more vigor and determination.

To be sure, this turn was already evident under Sweeney's predecessor. Not long after George Meany stepped down as the AFL-CIO's leader in 1979, the newly-installed Lane Kirkland abandoned the organization's historic stance of political independence in favor of a strategic alliance with liberal special-interest groups like the NAACP and the National Organization for Women (NOW). As labor has become more engaged, its institutional orientation on a whole range of issues has begun to shift from, essentially, the Center to the Left.

Where, for example, the AFL-CIO had long treated affirmative action with wariness, in the 80's it took to supporting racial preferences, first in the name of righting past discrimination and then, in the Sweeney era, in the name of open-ended "diversity." To garner support among women, it endorsed the notion that women's wages should no longer be determined by the marketplace but according to the feminist principle of "comparable worth." Stirrings of even more radical change were visible within AFL-CIO affiliates like the Service Employees International union, where middle-aged veterans of the New Left as well as a younger generation of activists were invited to assume staff positions.

Under Sweeney, even as a somewhat more conciliatory approach is being pursued on narrower issues involving cooperation between labor and management, the change in the composition of the machinery has intensified, to the point where a genuine radical-leaning culture has begun to take root within the AFL-CIO apparatus. This is most evident in the recruitment of personnel. One source is composed of operatives from left-wing splinter groups like the New party, the Labor party, and the Democratic Socialists of America (which Sweeney himself joined after his election as AFL-CIO president). Another and larger source is made up of individuals hailing from the environmental and feminist movements, the offices of liberal Congressmen, and even the Clinton administration. With this combined new crop of activists taking charge, AFL-CIO conferences and publications have regularly begun to showcase a view of America as a society built on the ongoing exploitation of the working class and the oppression of women and minorities.

Whether the AFL-CIO's policies will shift even further to the Left remains an open question. What is much less open to question is the damage that Sweeney's brand of partisanship is likely to do to the cause of labor itself. For one thing, the continuing problem of corruption within union ranks, in the past most often a matter of simple venality, has taken on a strong ideological coloration as union involvement in political affairs intensifies. In a scandal now under investigation by the Justice Department, Sweeney's close aide, the AFL-CIO's secretary-treasurer Richard Trumka, appears to be deeply involved in a money-laundering scheme to

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aid some of his left-wing allies in the Teamsters, a scheme that also included a strange mixture of organizations ranging from the Democratic National Committee to radical fringe groups like Citizen Action. Though Trumka has invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused to testify, Sweeney has stood firmly behind him, and indictments of high-ranking officials are a distinct possibility. This sort of thing is hardly calculated to enhance the movement's image and reputation.

For another thing, labor's involvement in political campaigns is causing a serious backlash of its own. On June 2, the voters of California defeated passage of Proposition 226, a "Payroll Protection" initiative that would have banned unions from continuing to spend membership dues on political campaigns without annual written approval from each member. But only a massive push by labor, including the expenditure of $11 million in a TV campaign, ensured the defeat of this referendum, which in early surveys enjoyed huge levels of support. Measures similar to it are likely to come before voters or legislatures in several other states. They represent the most serious challenge to labor's self-declared institutional interests since the 1950's, when a number of states abolished the so-called closed shop by enacting right-to-work laws.

THERE IS considerable evidence, indeed, that in places like California, it is precisely labor's leftward turn that is contributing to its present vulnerability. Not only is public opinion dismayed by the AFL-CIO's partisan approach to politics, and by its consistent support of candidates on the left end of the Democratic party, but many union members themselves have become severely disaffected from the politics of the organizations they pay to represent them. This, too, is an old story. More than 40 percent of union members voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984 and again for George Bush in 1988; in congressional elections, more than a third of union members cast ballots for Republicans over the past decade or so. According to one pollster, 82 percent of union members favor a constitutional amendment to balance the budget, and 87 percent would require welfare recipients to work in exchange for benefits—both positions firmly opposed by the AFL-CIO.

Inevitably, a price has to be paid for the lack of ideological congruence between, on the one hand, what has become the AFL-CIO's center and, on the other hand, the American grassroots, including many union members themselves. The California referendum suggests that the bill is already coming due, and one can only hope that labor's close call there will lead to a serious reassessment of its current direction.

Not so very long ago, organized labor provided a leftward-drifting Democratic party with a centrist anchor, helping to wage a valiant struggle from within against the isolationism and cultural radicalism that doomed the Democrats to defeat after defeat. Today labor is attempting to impose a program very like the one that pushed the party to the margins. Though the road ahead is rocky no matter which direction the AFL-CIO turns, one thing is certain: if those running the organization persist in their current path, they will only accelerate American trade unionism's steady decline.

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Saturday Afternoon at the Zoo With Dad

A Story

Joseph Epstein

LEVINE'S HEART sank when he heard the honking siren—just like the Gestapo in that old Anne Frank movie—and then saw the red lights twirling atop the police car behind him. "Please turn right at the light," instructed a voice over the speaker. Levine moved his green Jaguar off Sheridan onto Granville. Dammit, there goes another twenty minutes. He was late as it was. A heavyset black cop approached. "May I see your license and insurance card, sir?" Removing them from his wallet, Levine passed the documents through the open window.

"I wonder if you're aware that you were speeding, Barry," the cop said, "doing 43 miles an hour in a 30-mile-an-hour zone."

Levine considered responding, "What's this Barry bullshit, officer, do we know each other? Just give me the ticket and let's both get going." In the good-old, bad-old Chicago days, he would have kept a ten-dollar bill in the plastic window of his wallet along with his driver's license, the cop would have slipped it out, returned the wallet, and everyone would have gone away happy. No longer. Levine decided to go with the honesty ploy. "I wouldn't be surprised, officer. I'm already late to pick up my kids for my weekend visit, and I guess I was pushing it. I'm awfully sorry."

It worked. "I'm a divorced father myself," the cop offered in return. "I know how it is."

"Yeah," Levine said, "it's not so great."

"I'm going to let you off on this one, Barry." The cop handed back Levine's documents. "But watch it. The next officer stops you may just be a happily married man."

"Not too many of those," said Levine with a smile, "but thanks a lot. I appreciate it."

Nice cop, decent guy, a good sign, lucky day maybe. Levine could use the luck. He had been living in dread since he first heard from Sandy on Monday.

"Barry?" she had said over the phone, and at the sound of her voice, Levine froze. "Barry? It's Sandy." Her casualness blotted out the fact that she and Levine hadn't spoken for more than four—Jesus!—it would soon be five years.

"Sandy, good to hear from you," Levine lied. "What's doing?"

It turned out she was coming from Los Angeles to Chicago for her 20th high-school reunion, and she was bringing the kids. They were going to stay for three days, and she had all the bases covered except for Saturday afternoon, when a class picnic was planned and she had no one to watch Jonathan and Jennifer. Could he take them off her hands for five, maybe six hours?

Had he been faster on his feet, Levine would have claimed an out-of-town appointment, a golf date, exploratory surgery, some damn thing. But somehow he lost it. He heard himself saying, in a dopey, unbelievably saccharine voice: "Sure, Saturday afternoon will be great. Where can I pick them up?" What a schmuck!

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MRS. Sandra Kantor Levine Kravitz, Levine's first and former and only wife, had been remarried for nearly eight years now, and thank God Kravitz had come along when he did. Ten years older than Levine, never married, a lawyer who worked in trusts and estates with a big Jewish firm in L.A., Harvey Kravitz had gotten him off the hook in more ways than one. Because of him, Levine did not have to think about his ex-wife with pity, anger, or guilt; he didn't have to think of her at all, and in fact he almost never did.

Soon after marrying her, Kravitz also told Sandy they needn't bother with child-support payments. Although Levine put up a feigned protest, this was dandy with him. Two grand less a month going out, and not an easy check to write—two G's for the maintenance of children he no longer saw and to help out a wife he'd really just as soon didn't exist. He could find better uses for the money.

Jonathan had been three and Jennifer a year and a half when Levine and Sandy divorced. In their generally acrimonious separation, visitation was one of the biggest bones of contention. Marty Spivak, Levine's attorney, had fought for Levine to get the children every weekend and—once they were in school—during spring and Christmas vacations and for a full month each summer. It sounded good at the time. But what was a bachelor, then in his early forties, supposed to do with two infant children for a full weekend?

Levine's parents were still alive, and at first he used to bring the kids over to their place. They were very good about it, doting and generous in the way of Jewish grandparents. But for him, hanging around his parents' apartment in Winston Towers with its lime-colored, wall-to-wall shag rug, the weekends stretched out interminably. Pushing his daughter in a stroller around the streets of West Rogers Park, carrying his son piggyback, he often went to a nearby playground to put Jonathan on the swing or play with both children in the sandbox. Each weekend came to seem like a fiscal quarter—a bad fiscal quarter.

Levine began to skip occasionally. Then his mother got liver cancer, and, with her chemo treatments, became too weak to help look after the kids. By the time Harvey Kravitz came along, Levine was ready—relieved—to let him move Sandy and the kids to Los Angeles. Two years later, after a couple of notably unsuccessful visits—he stayed at a Ramada Inn in Westwood, mostly watching pay-per-view movies in his room—Sandy announced that Kravitz wanted to adopt Jonathan and Jennifer, and he was ready to concede that, too.

"Barry," his father told him, "don't be crazy. They're your children, your flesh and blood, they should carry your name." But Levine felt he had no leverage. The children had never come to Chicago, and his Los Angeles visits were a complete bust, demoralizing in every way. What the hell, he thought, Kravitz pays all the bills, and they seem to like him well enough. Let them be Kravitz's kids, let them take his name. In the end, what, really, does it matter? After a year or so, he ceased calling every few weeks; then he stopped sending birthday gifts. Finally, he no longer even thought of himself as a father.

WHEN THEY were married, there was nothing that Sandy and Levine couldn't find to fight about: her parents, his parents, his friends, her friends, money, child-raising methods, food, and of course sex. Levine was thirty-five when he married—no kid—Sandy twenty-four. He had felt maybe it was time for him to come in with his hands up. A grievous error. The problem probably wasn't even Sandy; it was marriage. He, Levine came to conclude about himself, was just one of the world's natural bachelors.

After the divorce he moved into an apartment on Scott Street, on the old gold coast. He left the commodities market each afternoon at 2:00, and by 2:30 he was on the treadmill at the McClure Court Club, or shooting baskets in a pickup game, or sitting in a Jacuzzi, checking out passing women, of whom, for a man with money and leisure, there seemed to be no shortage. Most evenings, when not with a younger woman, he would have dinner with a few guys from the club. They would talk sports, or stocks, or funny adventures with broads.

He liked things the way they were. One Friday afternoon at McClure a guy named Lou Berlin asked if he was free for the weekend. Berlin had just invited two girls on a high-rollers' junket to Vegas; he needed to make a foursome, but they had to be on a plane at O'Hare in two hours. Levine looked at the woman he was to escort—Debbie was her first name, Berlin hadn't quite caught her last—a racquetball player at the club, small, nice body, thick dark hair, and said, why not, let's go. He boarded the plane with nothing but the clothes he was wearing and his American Express card and bought everything, even underwear, at Caesar's Palace. Debbie turned out to be a very accommodating young lady, Levine won more than three grand at craps and blackjack, and as a souvenir of the weekend he still had two pair of cashmere socks for which he had paid 50 bucks a shot.

When Levine went out with a new girl—and most of the women he went out with he thought of

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as girls—he would tell her that he was divorced but never mention having had children. If they asked, he lied and said no. He wasn't likely to be with the girl that long, so the lie was unlikely to catch up with him. And thus far it hadn't.

It was 11:10 when Levine's Jaguar pulled up in front of the Northshore Hilton. He was 40 minutes late, and Sandy and the two children were waiting at the entrance. He felt an urge to accelerate and keep driving. From the car, he could see that the girl, now ten-and-a-half, had her mother's fair skin and light hair—dishwater blond, it used to be called; he noted, too, the braces on her teeth. Jonathan looked more like a Levine, dark, small, with curly hair; he looked, in fact, astonishingly like Levine at the same age. Sandy, who had put on a few pounds, seemed exactly what she was, a rich attorney's wife and a mother who had fought, successfully, to keep her family together. A brief and thoroughly unexpected flare of admiration shot through him.

Pulling the car over, Levine left the engine running and walked up to them. He had neglected to prepare an opening line.

"Sorry to be late."

"Hello, Barry," his ex-wife said, all business. "I'd like it if you could have Jonathan and Jenny back here at the hotel by 5:00."

"Shouldn't be a problem."

"Great," she said, "and thanks for helping out." Was there a touch of sarcasm in her voice, or was Levine imagining it? His radar wasn't working so well this morning. Probably he was imagining. At any rate he hoped he was.

"Maybe we'll have a chance to talk later," Sandy said, turning back into the cool dark of the lobby.

Levine and the children had not yet spoken. Both kids got into the back seat. As Levine pulled out, he caught a glimpse of them in the rearview mirror sitting close together, almost huddled. It occurred to him they might feel even more awkward than he.

"What do you say to lunch and a trip to the zoo in Lincoln Park?" He had nearly six hours to kill. Although it was early June, the Cubs were out of town, and besides it might be a mistake to take a girl to a ball game, though for all he knew his daughter might be one of those girl athletes. He didn't really know about the boy. Maybe he was a video-game nut. Who knew?

"Whatever you want," replied Jonathan.

"OK," Levine said, sensing a long afternoon, "the zoo it is."

He took McCormick over to Devon, thinking the kids might be interested in the neighborhood where he and their mother had both grown up. Of course, it had all changed drastically since those days. West of California, it was now dominated by kosher butchers, Jewish bookstores, Hebrew day schools. Men in hasidic garb walked the streets; on weekdays, young wives wearing wigs and with three or four children in tow popped in and out of stores. East of California, Devon became heavily East Indian, with lots of sari shops, vegetarian groceries, jewelry emporia, stores with appliances wired for India. "West Rajah's Park," his friend Mel Rosen now called the neighborhood.

"Your mother and I grew up here," Levine said. "Has she ever told you anything about it?"

"She said that people didn't think too much about crime," the girl piped up. "Not like now." To Levine, studying her in the mirror, her braces made her seem all the more vulnerable.

"That's true," he said. "When I was younger than you, Jonathan, my parents let me go downtown on the El by myself. My father—you probably don't remember him— grew up with two guys who owned a gym where boxers trained. They let me hang out there. You care about sports?"

"Pro basketball," the boy said.

"Me, too," Levine agreed. "Follow the Bulls?"

"Who doesn't? Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, crazy Dennis Rodman."

"I like Rodman's hair," the girl said, "but Mommy says his bleaching it so many colors is going to ruin it."

"He can rebound like crazy," Jonathan put in. "But he can't stand up to Shaq in the low post. In the low post Shaq would take him on tour."

"You're both right," Levine said. So he had a son who knew sports. His own boyhood was dominated by them: playing, watching, fantasizing. Something nice about this discovery.

On the Outer Drive he passed Weiss Memorial Hospital, where both his parents had died. Best to leave this unmentioned. Through his divorce, he had deprived his own parents of the pleasures of their grandchildren. Neither had ever said anything to him about it. He doubted that he himself would ever be a grandfather, except in the most remote and technical sense. Right now that didn't seem to him much of a deprivation. Different generations, different views.

At a Greek restaurant on Halsted named Demi's he ordered an omelette made with egg whites while the children had cheeseburgers with fries and Cokes.

"You like growing up in California, Jennifer?"

"Nobody calls her Jennifer," Jonathan said. "Everybody calls her Jenny."

"Sorry."

"It's fun," the girl said, "though maybe I'd like to see snow sometimes."

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"California's all we know," Jonathan added. "We've got nothing to compare it to."

"When you were little, of course," Levine reminded them, "you lived in Chicago."

"You mean when you were our father," Jenny said.

"Right." Past tense noted.

Halfway through lunch Jenny knocked over her Coke, half of which spilled onto her brother's fries and uneaten cheeseburger. Rising to wipe up the mess, Levine noticed a redhead, maybe in her late twenties, entering the restaurant; impressive jugs but, in his judgment, a little short in the leg. Not, right now, a good time to make a move. He must have seemed like a divorced father out with his kids for the weekend, or maybe a guy giving his wife a break on a Saturday, but certainly not what he was—a permanent bachelor, perpetually on the attack.

APPARENTLY A visit to the zoo on a sunny early summer day was not an altogether original idea. Three times Levine drove around the streets before finally pulling into a garage on Clark where a sullen Mexican took a twelve-buck fee without any thanks.

At the entrance to the park, Jenny wanted a great blue bouffant of cotton candy being sold by a Pakistani.

"She's not supposed to eat candy because of her braces," her brother said, a note of satisfaction in his voice.

"Yes I can," the girl protested, "if I rinse after."

"Where are you going to rinse here, dork?"

"None of your business, moron."

"OK," Levine stepped in, "let's take a pass. We'll get some ice cream and peanuts inside. How's that?"

"But I *love* cotton candy," Jenny said, "and I can rinse out at one of the fountains."

Screw it, Levine thought, I see these kids for one day; am I supposed to be responsible for her character as well as her dental hygiene? He shelled out two bucks and handed Jenny the blue cone.

The zoo was teeming. Lots of kids being wheeled around in strollers. Many grandparents, plus some guys with younger wives and little kids—second-family men. A band was playing: blacks in dreadlocks clanged away on steel drums while a woman with a shaved head sang a combination of African and Caribbean melodies. Levine took Jenny's hand. Jonathan walked a few steps ahead. They joined the crowd around the seals, who were darting in and out of their pool and hooting as they slapped themselves dry on the rocks.

Levine looked around for Jonathan, but he was gone. The seal exhibit had an underground walkway with windows that allowed you to view the animals from beneath. Probably, the boy had gone down for a look.

"Jenny," Levine said, letting go of her hand, "wait right here. Don't move. I have to find your brother." Quickly he walked downstairs, the blue from the water giving off a slightly eerie light in the darkish corridor. Three black kids in NBA jerseys with baggy shorts, big shoes, and baseball hats worn backward stared into one of the windows. At the end of the walkway Levine found Jonathan peering through another. He thought briefly of scolding him but instead took his hand and walked him back outside. When they got there, Jenny was gone. "Shit," Levine said aloud. "Now what?"

"She sometimes just goes off by herself," the boy replied, "like in a department store or something. She can get kinda dreamy. My mom and dad always find her." The "dad," of course, was Kravitz.

The sun was shining with particular radiance. People seemed happy to be out with their children, gazing at animals, drinking soda, eating lemon ices, listening to music. Calm seemed everywhere but in Levine's heart. He wasn't even sure in which direction to begin. There had to be a central lost-and-found somewhere, but would Jenny know where to find it and have the good sense to wait for him there?

He steered Jonathan into the nearby big-cat house. Most of the lions, leopards, and tigers were out-of-doors, lazing, along with a solitary cheetah, in the sun. Searching the nearly empty building, he noted only a single panther padding slowly around its cage. The muscles in the beast's chest, the cold look in its eyes, sent a shiver through Levine. These days the press was full of child-molestation stories. Block it out.

They tried the snake house. No Jenny. Then the ape house, a new building. The large gorillas were napping. The orangutans seemed idiotic, the baboons even lewder than he remembered. Where the hell was she? C'mon, sweetheart, Levine pleaded silently, don't put me through this. Outside, back in the beaming sun, Levine took Jonathan's hand. They passed the giraffes with their gentle quizzical looks, the zebras swishing their tails, shaggy bisons and wildebeests seriously in need of a bath. Finally, they came upon a building marked Information Center.

"Excuse me," Levine said to the young woman inside with a diamond chip on the side of her nose. "Is there a lost-and-found for kids? I want to report a little girl missing."

"It's at Gateway House," she said, "at the East Gate. Would you like me to call to see if she's there? We could also have her paged."

"Please," Levine said. "Her name's Jenny Kra-

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vitz. She's ten, and she's wearing a red T-shirt and jeans. Braces on her teeth."

"No problem."

Maybe for you, Levine thought. He had a pretty good imagination for disaster, and at the moment it was envisioning Mexican street gangs, old perverts, canny kidnappers, ransom notes; the possibilities were practically endless.

"I'M SORRY, your daughter's not at Gateway House," the girl reported, hanging up the phone. "But she could show up at any moment, Mr. Kravitz, and in the meantime I'll do a page."

"Thanks," he said. "But it's Levine, not Kravitz."

"I thought you said her name was Kravitz."

"It is, but mine's Levine. It's a long story."

"I see," she said, not looking as if she did. As they left the building, they heard Jenny's name over the public-address system.

"I'm thirsty," Jonathan said. "Could I get a Coke or something?"

The closest spot was Café Brauer, a bit in the distance, but Levine thought he ought to accommodate the boy. They sat for a moment at one of the tables along the lagoon.

"What will you do," Jonathan asked, "if my sister's dead?"

"Jesus," said Levine, "she's not dead. Don't even talk that way."

"No, I mean what would you do if she was?"

"I'd feel terrible," Levine said. "Wouldn't you?"

"Yeah, sure, but I mean I'm her brother. I'm supposed to."

"Well, I'm her father."

"Not really."

"What do you mean not really?"

"I mean you're only sort of our father, but not really. Isn't that right? I mean you don't see us, you don't talk to us. Do you think about us?"

"Of course I think about you," Levine said. "All the time."

"Then how come you never call or anything?"

"I guess I think maybe it makes it easier on everybody if I don't. I mean, you live far away and everything."

"I once asked my new dad what he would do if he didn't live with his children, and you know what he said?"

"No," said Levine.

"He said it would kill him if he lost his children. But then he said that everyone is different and we shouldn't judge you. Maybe you have your reasons." The boy paused.

"I do have reasons," Levine said, sweating. "The main one is that I didn't want to make your lives more complicated. Your mother and I didn't get along so well when we were married, and I thought maybe it would be easier if I just sort of disappeared."

"I see," Jonathan said, dropping his eyes and putting the straw in his mouth.

"Look," Levine said, "we better get to Gateway House. Maybe your sister is there waiting for us."

"Maybe," the boy said, noisily draining the last of his drink.

Levine thought they should check the petting zoo, which was in a nearby barn. As he and the boy walked through the door, he saw Jenny standing near a small black goat. A flash of anger was quickly swallowed by relief. He watched as the child made a tentative approach to the little goat. Hard to believe she would be a woman one day, exciting to men, with her own plots and agendas. As they walked up to her she turned and smiled as if nothing in the world were wrong. God, Levine thought, those braces! He put his hand on her head, about to pet her just as she was petting the goat. Then he remembered his anger.

"Where have you been?" he said, hearing the sternness in his voice. "You had your brother and me worried sick."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I just got tired of waiting for you at the seals."

"Mom would kill you if she knew what you did," her brother lectured her.

"It's none of your business."

"It's my business," Levine interjected. "I'm responsible for you, at least for this afternoon. And Jonathan's right. Your mother would be furious with both of us if she knew you just took off on your own the way you did."

"You know she would, too, Jenny," Jonathan added.

"Look, let's get out of here," Levine said. "Let's get out of the zoo and get an ice cream or something."

They made their way out, Jenny's hand tightly folded in Levine's, Jonathan walking alongside. The Lincoln Park neighborhood seemed very youthful on this summer's day. Lots of young women in spandex, their hair pulled back in ponytails, out for a jog. They found a Baskin-Robbins on Clark, near Fullerton, where Levine stood in line behind a homosexual couple roughly his own age, two bald guys in tank tops. He bought double-dip sugar cones for the kids—rocky road and cherry vanilla for Jenny, two scoops of pistachio for Jonathan—and a nonfat frozen chocolate yogurt for himself. A booth opened up, and they grabbed it.

"Are you gonna tell Mommy about my getting lost?" Jenny asked.

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"Would you prefer I didn't?"

"Yeah," she said, "I think she'd only get mad—I mean, really mad."

"What do you think, Jonathan?" Levine asked. "Can we keep it a secret, just between the three of us?"

"OK," he said, "I won't tell."

"Bet he does," Jenny said.

"Bet I won't."

"If Jonathan says he won't tell, he won't tell," Levine said. "He looks to me like a man who keeps his word, and I believe him." He put out his hand; Jenny took it. Levine then reached for Jonathan's hand and put it on top. "So it's our secret then," he said.

DRIVING HOME, brother and sister once more sat in the back seat. Passing Weiss Memorial again, Levine, feeling like a chauffeur in his own car, said: "See that red-brick building on the left? That's where my mother and father died. They were your grandparents, you know."

"Were they nice?" Jenny asked.

"Very nice, fair and kind and good-hearted, and they loved you both when you were babies, though of course you can't be expected to remember them."

"What did they die from?" Jonathan asked.

"Cancer. Both of them. Your grandmother first."

"Why did you and Mommy get divorced?" Jenny asked. "Mommy said you stopped loving each other. Is that true?"

"Sort of," Levine said. "But maybe it's just as true to say that I didn't like being married all that much."

"Does that mean you didn't like being our father?" the girl asked.

A tough question. "I wouldn't put it that way," he said, looking at the kids in the mirror. He was glad to be sitting where he was, where they couldn't see directly into his face. "I would say that I wasn't all that good at being a father."

"Is that a good reason for leaving us?" Jonathan put in.

"No, I suppose not. But your new father's good to you, right? He loves you, right? So maybe it worked out for the best."

"It's not the same thing," the boy said. Had Levine himself at twelve been as relentless as this kid?

"It's not the same thing as what?"

"It's not the same thing as having your real father," Jonathan said.

Levine, turning off the Outer Drive and onto Sheridan Road, didn't answer.

"Do you love us?" Jenny asked.

"What a question. Of course I do." He was passing the place where, earlier today, the cop had stopped him for speeding. No response from the back seat. After another block or two, the silence seemed chilling. At the corner of Sheridan and Devon, Levine thought to tell them about the great Granada movie theater that once stood here, an Aladdinish place, huge and wildly ornate, where he went every Friday night through high school. Going to the Granada as a boy to watch Cary Grant and Gary Cooper and Tyrone Power, he certainly never thought he might one day become a father who would abandon his children. Life had its tricks, all right. Not that they had been left to poverty, hunger, or anything like that. They were probably living better with Kravitz than they would if he had stayed married to their mother. Maybe if they hadn't moved to goddamn California he would have managed to keep in touch. But they were two thousand miles away, for shit's sake. What was he supposed to do? Sneaking another peek in the mirror, Levine realized he couldn't quite successfully suppress what he knew was the correct answer to that question.

It was 5:05 when the Jaguar pulled up to the door of the Hilton. Sandy, waiting inside, came out and opened the back door.

"Did you have a nice time?"

"Yes," Jenny said. Jonathan said nothing.

"The zoo was crowded," Levine offered. "We had an ice cream about an hour or so ago. Hope it won't spoil their dinner."

A bit nervous, Levine wasn't clear about the choreography of his departure.

"Want to come in for a cup of coffee?" Sandy asked.

"Thanks, but I'd better be off. Besides, you probably want to get going."

"I suppose we should."

"It was fun," Levine said. "They're good kids." He put out his hand to Jonathan, who shook it without looking at him. Turning to Jenny, he found himself pulling the child to him and kissing the top of her head. "Bye, baby," he muttered.

"Good-bye," she said. It occurred to him that neither of them had called him anything all day long.

In a slightly jerky movement, Sandy quickly leaned in, brushing his cheek with hers. "Thanks."

Somehow Levine managed to get back behind the wheel, lower the window on the passenger side, and try his best to smile and wave as he pulled away. In the rearview mirror he saw his ex-wife, her free arm around the shoulder of her daughter, the two of them waving back; her son made no movement at all. For once, Levine was glad he had nothing on for the evening. Maybe he'd grab a sandwich, watch a ball game on television, hit the sack early. It had been a long day.

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OBSERVATIONS

The Gingrich Manifesto

John O'Sullivan

"EXPERIENCE IS the name we give to our mistakes," said Oscar Wilde, who in his later imprisonment and exile would have the experience to prove it. Contemporary America takes a more cheerful and practical view of error: it is something to be publicly confessed to, learned from, and made the basis for subsequent advance of one's career.

Nor is this view confined to the world of daytime talk shows or popular books offering quick routes to emotional health. Bill Clinton was successfully presented in the 1992 election as a man unafraid either to weep or to make amends. And though the President has temporarily ceased admitting wrongdoing—he does, after all, seem to be guilty of some, which complicates matters—the idea that a strong man should face up to his own past errors in public is firmly established as the correct form. It has completely replaced the maxim of an earlier day, now upheld only by newspaper editors: "Never apologize, never explain."

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This is the cultural background to Newt Gingrich's latest book, *Lessons Learned the Hard Way*,* whose subtitle is "A Personal Report." By the standards of the past, this would seem a hard work to place. For it is common knowledge that Gingrich is seriously pondering a presidential bid, which means that any book by him must be considered a campaign manifesto. Yet this one appears to break certain well-established rules of the genre.

Campaign books, after all, usually contain long lists of policy proposals designed to show that the author has thought deeply about the problems facing America (if a Republican) or mankind (if a Democrat); this book contains surprisingly little wonkery, and that little crops up mostly in the course of vivid accounts of recent political struggles. Again, campaign books are usually written in the serviceable and impersonal prose of a VCR manual; this one is direct, personal, lucid, and at times engrossing. Finally, campaign books have traditionally shown the author in an uncritical light; the author of *Lessons* admits to a catalogue of serious political errors.

In that respect, however, *Lessons* does conform to current practice, and, in doing so, it also fulfills one of the purposes of any proper campaign document: it strives to make us think better of the candidate. Since Newt Gingrich's approval ratings were almost subterranean when the book was being written, and his treatment by the press abysmal, that is certainly a legitimate ambition.

The fact is, indeed, that Gingrich has been the target of media hostility ever since his successful campaign in the late 1980's to remove the former Speaker of the House, Jim Wright, on ethics charges; by now, he has been more vilified than any politician since Richard Nixon. It is worth inquiring briefly about the source of this animosity.

Surely it cannot be justified by any of the flaps recounted in *Lessons*. These fall into three categories: minor trip-ups on Gingrich's part, like his foolish (his word) complaint about the President's having ignored him on an Air Force One flight back from the funeral of Yitzhak Rabin in Israel; instances of gross and sometimes deliberate bias on

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the part of individual reporters, as in the tit-for-tat ethics scandal over Gingrich's alleged misuse of tax-exempt funds to teach a "political" college course; and examples of media compliance with the White House's calculated shaping of a story to portray Gingrich as a hard-hearted Republican villain, as in the protracted fight over Medicare.

Nor could his politics be the explanation. For one of Washington's best-kept secrets is that Newt Gingrich's views, far from being "extremist," are those of a moderate conservative with techno-nerd overtones. In *Lessons*, Gingrich himself seeks to keep this secret safe by frequently expressing his admiration for the GOP House "militants"; but the truth emerges implicitly, as we shall see, in the sorts of issues and policies he either stresses or ignores.

Why the vilification, then? As with Nixon, what seems to infuriate Democrats and the media alike is that Gingrich combines his moderate conservatism with a strong and stinging partisanship. Reporters can accept a partisan Democrat—partisanship is the nature of that particular beast. But a partisan Republican, like a violent gentleman, seems both a breach of etiquette and a moral contradiction. The epitaph for a Republican is generally supposed to be F. E. Smith's judgment of the Conservative British statesman Austen Chamberlain (1863-1937): "Poor Austen. He always played the game, and he always lost it." Gingrich defies that fate, and is accordingly resented.

IT IS, however, that same defiance of fate, with all the disadvantages it entails, that signifies Newt Gingrich as a formidable political leader. As his account of the Jim Wright affair reminds us, it was no small feat for a minority Republican backbencher to take on the Speaker of the House and drive him from office. And even in Gingrich's own darkest days as Speaker—last year, in the one episode he shrouds in prose of Delphic discretion, a cabal of disloyal colleagues and young militants sought to replace *him*—he still dominated the Republican caucus, as indeed he does to this day. Few American politicians, moreover, have Gingrich's grasp of strategic and historical issues, or can speak so fluently, so engagingly, or in so deeply informed a manner on so wide a range of subjects, including, most recently, on the American relationship with Europe. Above all, he has survived a terrible shellacking, and in American politics the ability to survive may now itself be a main qualification for office.

Even before the publication of this book, Gingrich's reputation, as measured by approval ratings, had begun a recovery, and *Lessons* should certainly assist that process, if only by correcting the impression left by all the false reporting about him. Any halfway fair-minded reader should feel positively indignant at the press treatment of, to take only one example, the 1995-96 confrontation between the President and the House Republicans that led to the shutdown of the government; as Gingrich persuasively shows, the media either glossed over the President's mendacity throughout this entire episode, which ostensibly involved a dispute over the budget, or winkingly portrayed it as a series of brilliant political strokes.

But there is also a downside to Gingrich's candor. On issues ranging from the balanced budget, to the row over Republican amendments to the 1997 bill authorizing disaster relief to flood victims in the Red River Valley, to his handling of Clinton's Medicare scare, he repeatedly admits to serious error, reveals that he ignored sensible warnings from colleagues, and concedes that he underrated Clinton and the Democrats generally. We need not exaggerate these admissions—Gingrich has nothing to confess of a Clintonian nature, let alone on a Clintonian scale—but the political misjudgments he lists are indeed serious, and they suggest an impetuosity of character that may be a continuing problem. For that reason they also raise questions about his present and future leadership. Even in today's confessional climate, he is taking risks in baring his mind so frankly.

His excuse—no, his attempt at redress—is that he has learned the lessons of his mistakes. And indeed he lays out those lessons, chapter by chapter: learn to listen; learn to keep your mouth shut; pick your fights wisely; keep your eye on the ball; stay on offense; etc., etc. There is a great deal of shrewd political observation and advice contained here. But the current condition of the congressional Republicans—who to an outsider seem either totally shell-shocked or lying in wait for Clinton and the Democrats to fall into a hole of their own digging—hardly suggests that these lessons, and in particular the one marked "stay on offense," have been heeded or digested, including by Gingrich himself.

AN EXPLANATION for the apparent discrepancy, anticipated by Gingrich (and partly endorsed by Tod Lindberg in his review of this book in the June *American Spectator*), is that outsiders are not in a position to see the whole game. They cannot know all the conflicting interests that must be satisfied, or be aware of all the advantages enjoyed by the opposing team. In particular, Gingrich complains that outside-the-Beltway conservatives, having rightly criticized previous generations of Republicans for a failure of will power in fighting liberalism, now embrace the no less fallacious notion that in politics, will power is everything.

There is undoubtedly something to what he says. Gingrich's own experience in the government shutdown certainly demonstrated that will power alone was not very effective when Clinton had the Maxim gun and he did not. Yet, as the memoirs of retired politicians

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regretfully confirm, the outside-the-Beltway conservatives are sometimes right, too. Who now defends Richard Nixon's imposition of wage-and-price controls, or George Bush's breaking of his pledge not to raise taxes, both measures undertaken under the pressure of conflicting interests?

There is, alas, no hand-held calculator to tell us when the insiders are right and the outsiders wrong about what to do in a given situation of uncertainty. But we tend to trust those political leaders who we feel have a confident sense of where they are going in general and when we want to go in the same direction. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, occasionally quoted by Gingrich, is a case in point. People trusted her decision to surrender to striking coal miners in 1981 because they sensed, rightly as it turned out, that her retreat was a tactical one and that she would mount an offensive when conditions were right.

GINGRICH ALSO seems to know where he is going, but do enough voters want to follow him? What are his distinctive political issues? And are they sufficiently appealing to a sufficient number of people to enable him to establish his forward-looking brand of conservatism ("opportunity conservatism") as the new natural order in American politics? *Lessons* cannot answer such questions, among other reasons because it is not a policy handbook. But it does suggest a number of the strengths and weaknesses in Gingrich's brand of politics.

First, many of the issues that he helped to pioneer as a backbencher and that eventually drove the GOP to its majority status—including welfare reform and other portions of the conservative agenda—have now been embraced by liberals, and so have ceased to be political issues in any real sense. He recognizes this as a conservative achievement, but not as the problem it presents, which has been to deprive the GOP of important rallying cries and sources of support. Indeed, Gingrich is reluctant in general to accept that a number of the older issues he still cares about are, politically speaking, useless. He places great stress, for example, on fighting the drug war. Most voters believe that both political parties would like to win that war, but that neither knows how.

Second, the newer issues about which Gingrich is enthusiastic, notably technology and an entrepreneurial approach to the political process, are secondary in nature. They leave most people cold—is putting a tax bill on the Internet *really* "the dawn of a new age in responsible self-government"?—and they are easily trumped by more primitive appeals. No doubt Representative Deborah Pryce has done a fine job heading the committee shaping a Republican response to the proposed tobacco legislation; at least from the outside, however, the President's mobilization of popular and media resentment of the tobacco companies seems to have preempted the possibility of any considerable GOP response.

Third, Gingrich seems risk-averse when it comes to seizing upon those new political issues that, although legitimate in themselves, and also calculated to attract substantial support, are nonetheless likely to arouse controversy and perhaps allow the media to raise charges of racism, sexism, homophobia, or the like. Racial and sexual quotas are by far the best example. Others include bilingualism, the overturning of popular referenda by the courts (as in the case of the Colorado initiative prohibiting special preferences for homosexuals), immigration, and the whole range of topics associated with multiculturalism and the balkanizing of America. These are matters about which many people feel both desperate and indignant; yet the Republicans flirt nervously with them at best.

NEWT GINGRICH'S GOP is thus like a shiny new sports car: modern, streamlined, equipped with the latest accessories, designed for comfort, but lacking one essential—an engine. Very few people have strong, passionate reasons to buy it, and one can hardly blame them, for those in charge of marketing the new model are basically relying on their competitors to blow a gasket.

Still, the final verdict is not in. Newt Gingrich remains Speaker of the House, and he seems likely to run for President. If he should actually make that move and win, the past, including this book, would be merely prologue. And if he continues as Speaker, he will be, among the three most politically influential men in American life (the other two being the next President and Vice President, of either party), the one with the greatest experience in national government. How effectively will he use that power and influence? Will he succeed in ensuring that a discredited liberalism is followed by a truly vibrant conservatism as the reigning doctrine of American politics? And what will that conservatism look like? The answers to those questions will be determined in large part by whether he has really learned the lessons he sets out so lucidly in *Lessons Learned the Hard Way*.

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Beijing 1947

Michael Loewe

ONE DAY in March 1947, two young Englishmen, who had been ordered to describe themselves as members of the Foreign Office, arrived at His Britannic Majesty's consulate in Peip'ing, as Beijing was then called.* They had in fact been serving for some five years in the British Government Code and Cipher School at Bletchley Park, the predecessor intelligence agency to the organization later known as Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). After spending those years wrestling with the problems of Japanese codes and ciphers, they had received a few weeks' training in the Chinese language and were now being sent for six months of live study in China itself, where a number of British military officers were already engaged in the same enterprise. One of the two was the late K.M. Rees of GCHQ, the other was myself.

Young and highly impressionable, the two men had left a London whose streets ran with the gray slush of melted snow and ice, and it was barely credible that the floatplane or flying boat on which they embarked at Poole, on the Dorset coast, would deliver them to Hong Kong in a mere five days. But so it did, bringing new worlds to reality wherever its floats made their controlled and graceful impact on the waters: at Marseilles or Calcutta, on the Nile or the Irawaddy, and finally at Kaitak in Hong Kong. This was some years before a long runway was built there for jets, and as the flying boat drew in for its final descent, the passengers felt that by stretching an arm through the window they might be able to pluck the grass on the islands that lined the aircraft's path.

From Hong Kong the two passengers made their way by Chinese National Airways Company, stopping overnight at Shanghai. They had landed in a China that was engaged in a fierce and relentless civil war. Chiang Kai-shek—leader of the Kuomintang party, head of the internationally-recognized Nationalist government of the country, and bearer of the military rank of Generalissimo—was opposed by Mao Tse-tung, the supreme commander of the People's Liberation Army, who was destined to proclaim the People's Republic in October 1949. In Shanghai, the British consul general greeted them with warnings of shortages, inconveniences, and dangers ahead, for they would be in an area not too distant from the scenes of fighting between government forces and Communist insurgents.

The second lap of the flight brought a magnificent view of the Yangtse River—denied these days to jet-imprisoned passengers so many more thousands of feet above. At length, the pilot of the Skymaster kindly circled around China's last imperial capital, displaying to his charges a never-to-be-forgotten view of the double set of walls that surrounded the city and the palace

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*Chinese names will be given throughout in the older, Wade-Giles transliteration rather than in the Pinyin system first introduced in 1963 and now commonly used in the West.

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itself with its concentric rectangles of gaily colored roofs.

Michael Gillet, the urbane consul in Peip'ing, had not been fully informed of the status of the two young men, or of the nature of their work in London. In earlier postings, he himself had tasted the joys of consular life in remote sites like Kashgar in the extreme western part of the country or T'eng-yüeh, a walled town in Yunan, and in the best traditions of the service had spent his leisure hours studying Manchu. Somewhat nonplussed on this occasion, he nevertheless extended a warm welcome to his visitors, though he also terrified them on their first evening by a very kindly meant announcement: "We do not dress for dinner *every* night, gentlemen."

Very soon, the two were settled with comforts far superior to those of the style of life to which they had been accustomed: a small bungalow with a cook, one houseboy each, and a coolie; chairs, tables, and sofas that had graced the British legation in King Edward's time; and teachers chosen to give personal instruction in Chinese. To all this was added an early and invaluable piece of advice. Before venturing into the city streets to practice their halting speech, they would do well to imbibe a gin or two. This would work wonders to open lips and move tongues that the most adroit of native Chinese teachers had failed to loosen.

SITUATED TO the southeast of the imperial palace, the consulate lay within the old Legation Quarter of Peip'ing, the scene of British defense in the Boxer uprising of 1900 against Western influence in China. Outside the stone arch that had given access to British diplomats were the neighboring compounds of France, the United States, the Netherlands, and others. Only the gates of the Soviet consulate stood closed, for Stalin, who was eagerly looking forward to a Communist victory, had seen no reason to continue his recognition of Chiang Kai-shek's government. Of the Soviet consular officers who still found themselves in the city, at least one was taking full advantage of the curtailment of his duties by engaging in academic research.

Our Soviet colleagues also joined happily in the convivial parties at which the Western community gathered to praise the past and decry the present. Here the two young Englishmen were introduced to some of the ways of consular life, as those assembled would drink the health of King George VI, or celebrate the American Declaration of Independence, or simply return the hospitality of the rather hungry Chinese officials. Here, too, one might hear the reports of a passing messenger from the British crown on the latest iniquities of the Labor government, and contrive to introduce newly arrived visitors to those with whom they were duty-bound to converse.

Two distinguished Chinese stood out as guests at these parties: Hu Shih, at one time the ambassador to the United States, and Chao Yüan-jen, later to hold a chair in Chinese studies at an American university. Both men had by then contributed to a highly significant linguistic innovation whereby the old style of literary elegance in official writings was being replaced by the vernacular. Little remembered nowadays, this represented a real cultural revolution, if one can appropriate a term usually reserved for the sponsored antics and orchestrated violence of the 1960's.

Within the consulate office, an aged secretary who still wore traditional Chinese dress took it upon himself to provide the newcomers with Chinese names, so that they could have their visiting cards printed and thus avoid appearing naked at official functions. This man, Chin P'ei-shan, whose sunken cheeks betrayed an early addiction to opium, clearly felt that the passing in 1911 of the nearly four-centuries-old Ch'ing Dynasty had been nothing but a momentary accidental event, whose effect would soon be rectified. To Chin P'ei-shan, with his pure Pekingese accent, it was a matter of scorn that his colleague, a young accountant dressed in Western style, spoke Cantonese.

It was to this accountant, though, that the two young men repaired when they needed an advance on their salaries. At a time of rampant inflation, they would wait each week until the moment came for shopping and then spend as much money as quickly as possible, repeating the whole process the following week. In March, the paper bank-notes needed for these expeditions could perhaps fit into an inner pocket; by September, shoppers went to market carrying a suitcase. Somehow, the two young men spent a lot of money without ruining their credit; some of the expense was presumably met by the vagaries of exchange at a highly volatile moment in China's financial history.

SEVERAL CHINESE teachers were already then engaged in instructing British military officers, as well as the more numerous American officers in Peip'ing. As consular officers—for such had become their title—the two young gentlemen selected teachers both to provide oral practice and (for so they had been ordered) to introduce them to different types of contemporary official documents. Most teachers agreed that far more could be learned by contacts in the lively markets of the city than in the stifled atmosphere of a study or classroom, though one felt that his pupils should concentrate on ancient philosophical texts while another, an old-fashioned, Taoist-minded scholar who dressed in a black gown and wore one fingernail to the length of perhaps an inch, proposed to read the *Tao-te ching* with them.

Encouraged by many, and sometimes accompanied by a teacher, the

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two young men soon explored the city, sitting back in pedicabs or going by foot through the streets and narrow lanes. Majestic, brightly painted arches led the way into the main boulevards. In the courts of the Forbidden City, grass grew between the flagstones. Owing to the twin effects of sunlight and neglect, bare patches of plaster or wood were visible in the pillars and walls, bereft now of the oxblood paint that had long protected them from decay. A quiet, old-style teahouse still provided refreshment for the few visitors to the Temple of Heaven and its park, one of Asia's truly noble sites, then happily unspoiled.

Set as a double perimeter around the city stood the massive walls, a monument to the imperial might of the Ming (1368-1644) and Ch'ing (1644-1911) dynasties. In a few years' time, this massive structure would be seen as an affront to the new masters of the city. Only a few fragments of gateways and towers would survive the deliberate destruction of the 1960's, and then solely as an object lesson in how the working class, in pre-Marxist times, had been forced to labor for the delectation of its tyrannical masters.

THE STREETS and markets of the city, which then boasted perhaps a million and a half inhabitants, seemed unbelievably crowded to the two visitors. Smells ranged from the sweet bouquet of fruits and vegetables to the rank stench of filth and ordure, tempered throughout by the hot breath of garlic. An occasional caravan of Bactrian camels could be seen, harking back to the centuries-old method of conveying goods to and from Central Asia. Such a troop animates a still-surviving painting of the city of K'ai-feng, the capital of the brilliant Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127); the artist, Chang Tse-tuan, depicts scenes of daily life recognizable in the Peip'ing of 1947, where the notices and banners announcing the business, occupation, or trade of offices and shops were still made with an eye to calligraphic beauty in unabbreviated characters, and the lanes resounded to the traditional call of the craftsman or peddler proclaiming his skills as knife-grinder or shoemaker.

The broader avenues, lined with well-established trees, were set to the points of the compass, and divided the northern part of the city into the small cells of a grid. Such had been the design of imperial capital cities as far back as the former Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-8 C.E.), enabling the authorities to impose a curfew, control loiterers and criminals, and supervise the activities of the markets. In 1947, some of the traders set out their goods on the sandy embankment that lined the main east-west avenue, and there a fortunate collector might light upon a delicate example of cloisonné, or a finely lacquered compass that in the 18th century had served the needs of geomancy (*feng-shui*). Alongside the curio seller might be a barrow laden with luscious melons, sold by the slice and attracting flies whose descendants would soon be banished by Mao Tse-tung. For choice pieces of jade, bronze, or lacquer; chairs of rosewood; or bolts of so-called tribute silk, the shopper went elsewhere. The best sources of such rarities were the subject of much talk as the drinks were handed around at consular parties.

As in earlier capitals, so in Peip'ing certain large areas had been set aside as more formal markets for goods of all types. In one such square, named the *Tung An shih ch'ang*, each of the enclosed rows of stalls served the needs of a particular product, and the stall keepers enjoyed a friendly, competitive camaraderie. A large number of bookshops sold new publications, including copies of Nationalist China's constitution, or educational textbooks, or English-language pornography, not then openly on sale in the lands of George VI.

Of special interest were the stocks of secondhand books, for which a bookseller would ask an outrageously high price to initiate the whole enjoyable process of bargaining; a green customer who paid the asking price was treated with nothing but contempt. On the shelves lay the libraries of some of China's best scholars and students, who had fallen on evil times, along with some of the earliest Chinese publications to be bound in Western style. Or there might be the remnants of a foreigner's collection of European literature, hastily discarded before a return to the West. Japanese editions of classical Chinese texts lay piled on the floor as doorstops; the two young language students were glad to seize these rarities, to the great surprise of the bookseller—for who, in the Peip'ing of 1947, would want a written reminder of the recent Japanese intrusion into China? Perhaps, from some religious house in the West, an optimistic stallkeeper had taken in hand a set of the Jerusalem Talmud—and perhaps, in the greatly restricted market of today, he or his successor has it still, in hopes that a purchaser may yet appear.

The cognoscenti also knew where to go to find what have now become bibliographical rarities: copies of traditional blockprinted books, testaments to the industry of Chinese scholars, particularly of the Ch'ing period. For this purpose a teacher would take his pupil to the *Liu-li ch'ang*, once the site of the glaziers' workshops that had produced the tiled embellishments of the imperial city and later a depository of the voluminous products of traditional printing in China. A veritable treasure-house of scholarship five decades ago, the *Liu-li ch'ang* still today boasts a few shops named after the printing houses of Ming times and offering a small stock of pre-modern publications. But in the cleaned-up and freshly-painted *Liu-li ch'ang* of the 1990's, such prizes lie concealed from the buses that stop to allow tourists to buy their trinkets and gewgaws.

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On Sundays, visitors to the Peip'ing of 1947 might be taken to the Buddhist temples that nestled in the western hills, later to be commandeered as summer retreats for the privileged leaders of the Communist party. From the neighboring Catholic monastery of Chala, Brother Joseph would make his way into the city once a month. On his round of the consulates, he would take orders for the wines and spirits produced by the distillery of his order, and sooner or later these would grace the dinner table of a Westerner's establishment. Should a hostess desire to serve ice cream, however, she would have to choose her day with care, for but a single ice-cream machine was available to make the rounds of the consular houses. If her cook or head houseboy hinted that she should choose a different dessert, or a different date, she had better do so; and at the dinner that she would enjoy elsewhere on the night of her first choice, in the home of her American, Dutch, or French colleagues, she might well find herself regaled with Spuma Gelata di Marsala.

In the 1960's, Western students returning home after a brief visit to the Chinese capital would report excitedly that it was thanks to the Communist government that trees ran along the city's streets. If shown photographs of well-matured trees that had lent their shade to passersby for centuries, they would explain that this could only be propaganda, faked in Taiwan. Even today, the hordes of tourists taken to the Great Wall or the imperial tombs of the Ming Dynasty north of the city are told that it was impossible to see such sites before the liberation of 1949.

Certainly an expedition to the Ming tombs in 1947 involved a ride over rough tracks; but the way was not marred by placards proclaiming the virtues of the government. No guides brandished flags or raised megaphones to control their unruly groups. Where cafeterias and wayside stalls now supply the needs of the multitude, the few visitors of that time took their own picnic in a lonely spot. In place of the roar and fumes of tourist buses, an uncanny peace prevailed within the ring of hills surrounding the monuments and resting-places of the rulers of China's last native dynasty.

The experts in *feng-shui* who chose this site had used their compasses with skill. Until recently, the lay of the land prevented inroads by those evil influences (*sha*) that can wreak havoc at sites whose natural beauty is enhanced by spiritual blessing.

Music

Two Fallen Stars

Terry Teachout

In 1961, the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould canceled a scheduled appearance with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, claiming that he had developed a phobic reaction—in his words, "something approaching terror"—to the mere thought of playing in Philadelphia. He was replaced by a young virtuoso from Texas named Van Cliburn, who had himself become famous three years earlier after winning the Tchaikowsky Competition in Moscow. As Ormandy later wrote to Gould:

> Perhaps it will give you a chuckle when I tell you that every time I talked to Van, for some psychological reason, I called him Glenn. The third time it happened, he said he didn't mind at all because he loved Glenn and he considered it an honor and a pleasure to be called by that name.

The idea that anyone, especially anyone in the music business, might have confused these two pianists is indeed comical. Cliburn, a natural

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performer whom audiences found irresistibly charismatic, favored the work of such romantic composers as Tchaikowsky and Rachmaninoff, which he played in a warm and expansive style. By contrast, Gould, a Bach specialist who hated performing in public—his cancellation of the concert in Philadelphia was no isolated event—was noted for his crisp incisive touch and brisk tempos.

But a closer look does reveal a number of common threads in the lives of the two best-known piano virtuosos of the postwar era. Both men had been child prodigies; both briefly tried their hand at conducting; both showed early promise as composers but failed to develop their talents. Most importantly, both suffered from deep-seated emotional problems that made it difficult for them to function in the public eye. Gould abandoned the concert stage in 1964, at the height of his fame, thereafter playing only in the recording studio until his death eighteen years later; Cliburn quit playing altogether in 1978, and though he returned to the stage in 1989, he no longer makes records or appears regularly in concert.

BORN IN 1934, Van Cliburn began playing piano at the age of three. Until he moved from Texas to New York in 1951 to study at the Juilliard School, his only teacher was his mother, Rildia Bee Cliburn, who had studied piano with Arthur Friedheim, a pupil of Franz Liszt. As a boy, then, Cliburn absorbed both the pianistic style and the musical tastes of the late 19th century, and his mature playing would reflect these early influences.

While at Juilliard, Cliburn studied with Rosina Lhévinne. This celebrated teacher was the widow of Josef Lhévinne, a Russian virtuoso whose few recordings are coveted by connoisseurs of Romantic piano playing. Under her tutelage, Cliburn perfected his distinctive style, in which the extravagant rhetoric of Russian Romanticism was subtly blended with American simplicity. Though he had a big technique, he favored relaxed tempos that allowed him to "sing" the melodies of the 19th-century works that made up the bulk of his repertoire. His tone was rich and resonant, and he played with a rubato that was flexible yet disciplined.

In 1954, Cliburn received the prestigious Leventritt award, given by a panel of judges that included the pianists Rudolf Serkin and Eugene Istomin, the conductors Leonard Bernstein and George Szell, and the violinist Alexander Schneider. "He is remarkable," said the usually acerbic Szell in a note passed to one of his colleagues during Cliburn's performance. "No philosopher, in spite of the soulful facial expressions, but he makes beautiful sounds. Extraordinary skill and projection." It was an apt summing-up of the attributes that would make Van Cliburn a star.

WINNING THE Leventritt launched Cliburn on his career as a major soloist, and he was already a fixture on the American concert circuit when he won the Tchaikowsky Competition in 1958. But it was the latter award that introduced him to the public at large, and set the tone for his subsequent career. Held at the height of the cold war, the Tchaikowsky Competition had given American musicians their first opportunity to perform in the Soviet Union. Cliburn's sweepingly Romantic playing stunned his Soviet listeners, who for all their musical sophistication knew little of the United States. Though Soviet officials tried to fix the outcome in favor of a Russian contestant, the pianist Sviatoslav Richter insisted that Cliburn receive the first prize, and the then-premier Nikita Khrushchev personally gave his approval.

What followed was unprecedented in the history of classical music: the twenty-three-year-old Cliburn became an international celebrity overnight. The *New York Times* had been publishing a series of front-page stories about the competition in progress; the climax was a four-column-wide article announcing Cliburn's victory. The following week, the pianist was featured on the cover of *Time*, and later he appeared on the popular TV programs *Person to Person*, *The Tonight Show*, and *What's My Line?* RCA signed him to an exclusive contract, rushing into print a recording of the Tchaikowsky First Concerto made within days of the pianist's triumphant return to the United States. It sold a million copies within two years, the first classical album ever to do so.*

Cliburn would become the most successful classical musician of his generation, in large part because of the attention lavished on him by the mass media, which consistently portrayed him as an "all-American virtuoso" (the title of *Time*'s cover story), a middlebrow hero whose unaffected modesty and gregarious demeanor made palatable the fact that he played piano instead of baseball. His physical appearance—he was 6-foot-4 and had a baby face and a shock of curly blond hair—enhanced the memorable impression he made on stage.

All this mass-media coverage had

* Cliburn's 1958 recording of the Tchaikowsky Piano Concerto has remained continuously in print ever since its initial release (RCA 07863-55912-2). Among the best of his other recordings are a live performance of the Rachmaninoff Third Concerto from a Carnegie Hall concert given immediately after his return from the Soviet Union (RCA 6209-2-RC); the Rachmaninoff Second Sonata, recorded live in 1960 at a Moscow concert (RCA 7941-2-RG); *My Favorite Chopin*, a 1961 solo recital including the F-Minor *Fantasie*, Op. 49 (RCA 09026-68813-2); Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth Concertos, recorded in 1961 and 1963 with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony (RCA 7943-2-RG); Chopin's Second and Third Sonatas, recorded in 1967 (RCA 09026-60417-2); a group of solo pieces by Brahms recorded in 1970 and 1971, including the Op. 79 Rhapsodies (RCA 09026-60419-2); and a mixed recital consisting of the Barber Sonata, Op. 26, the Mozart C-Major Sonata, K. 330, and six pieces by Debussy (RCA 60415-2-RG).

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the effect of putting off many music critics, especially in New York. Cliburn's reviews, which had initially been enthusiastic, soon turned sour: by the mid-60's, it was commonplace to read that he was a shallow and superficial performer. This was deeply unfair. In fact, he ranked among the foremost pianists of the postwar era, and even in the late 70's, when his playing had grown erratic, he remained capable of giving compelling performances. Nor were his gifts confined to pianism. He was also a talented amateur composer, and after his return from the Soviet Union he studied conducting with Bruno Walter, subsequently making well-received guest appearances with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic.

BUT THE critics, though wrongheaded, were on to something, for Cliburn had come too far, too fast. His repertoire, though more wide-ranging than generally acknowledged, consisted mainly of the music he had learned as a student, and the list of concertos and solo works he played regularly grew smaller by the year. "In music, no matter how familiar, there are no twice-told tales," he liked to say, but his ability to shed new light on such oft-played pieces as the Beethoven "Appassionata" Sonata or the Rachmaninoff Third Concerto was not unlimited, and his crowded schedule left little room for reflection or renewal. After 1964, significantly, he never again conducted in public, and so far as is known, he no longer composes.

Cliburn's personal problems also cast a shadow over his triumphs. Much was made by the press of the fact that he was a devout churchgoer who lived with his mother until her death in 1994. But nothing was said of his homosexuality, which, though long known among musicians, did not become public information until just two years ago, when he was sued for palimony by a former lover. His inability to reconcile his squeaky-clean image with the realities of his offstage life undoubtedly contributed to his increasing artistic uncertainty.

By the early 70's, Cliburn's live performances had become inconsistent, and major orchestras were reluctant to hire him as a soloist. Exhausted by two decades of touring, he stopped accepting new engagements in 1974, playing his last concert four years later; not until 1989 would he begin performing again, and then only on a limited basis. A 1994 American tour proved that while the sixty-year-old pianist was still capable of playing excitingly, his musical horizons had shrunk still further; Cliburn's repertoire for the seventeen-city tour consisted of the Tchaikowsky First and Rachmaninoff Third Concertos, plus a short group of solo pieces he had been playing since the mid-50's. Even his staunchest admirers were forced at last to admit that something had gone terribly wrong with the man whom the formidable music critic B. H. Haggin had once described as "one of the outstandingly, supremely great pianist-musicians of today, and not only of today."

GLENN GOULD, Cliburn's senior by two years, also began playing piano at the age of three, and by 1945 he was performing regularly throughout Canada. Shunning the high-profile competition circuit, he made his American debut in 1955 in Washington, D.C., playing the Bach G-Major Partita, Beethoven's E-Major Sonata, Op. 109, and works by the 17th-century composers Orlando Gibbons and Jan Sweelinck and the 20th-century modernists Alban Berg and Anton Webern. It was by any standard a highly unorthodox program, but Paul Hume, who reviewed the concert for the *Washington Post*, found it spellbinding:

> Glenn Gould is a pianist with rare gifts for the world. It must not delay hearing [him] and according him the honor and audience he deserves. We know of no other pianist like him of any age.

Nine days later, the twenty-two-year-old pianist repeated the program at New York's Town Hall for a tiny audience consisting mainly of other musicians who had heard about his Washington recital. David Oppenheim, a Columbia Records executive, attended the concert and immediately signed him to an exclusive contract; in June, he recorded Bach's "Goldberg" Variations, and the performance, which was released the following year, became a best-seller.*

The sheer originality of Gould's youthful playing, preserved on his 1955 version of the "Goldbergs" and the many other performances he recorded for Columbia while still in his twenties, continues to this day to astonish listeners. Unlike most pianists, he used a bare minimum of pedal, relying instead on his precise fingerwork to produce a clean, nonlegato sound reminiscent of a harpsichord. Though his tempos tended to be on the quick side, he was capable of playing slow movements with a sustained, trance-like intensity; the 25th variation of the "Goldbergs" is a particularly striking example of this quality of inwardness. Whether fast or slow, he played with an exhilarating forward thrust that was as irresistible in its way as Van Cliburn's expansive warmth.

But Gould, unlike his younger

* Gould's 1955 recording of the "Goldberg" Variations, like Cliburn's 1958 recording of the Tchaikowsky First Concerto, has never been out of print (Sony SMK 52594). A selection of his early recordings, including performances of Beethoven's first two piano concertos and last three piano sonatas, Mozart's C-Major Sonata, K. 330, and Haydn's E-Flat Major Sonata, Hob. XVI:49, can be heard on *The Glenn Gould Legacy*, Vol. 2 (Sony M3K 39036, three CD's). Of comparable interest are the six Bach Partitas (Sony SM2K 52597, two CD's); a collection of solo pieces by Byrd, Gibbons, and Sweelinck (Sony SMK 52589); the Mozart C-Minor Piano Concerto, K. 491, with Walter Susskind and the CBC Symphony (Sony SMK 52626); and a collection of solo pieces by Brahms (Sony SM2K 52651).

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colleague, was idiosyncratic to the point of eccentricity, both on and off stage. He sang aloud to himself as he played, swayed in time to the music, "conducted" himself whenever he had a free hand, and used a specially-built folding chair that allowed him to sit much lower relative to the keyboard than other pianists. A lifelong hypochondriac, he wore gloves and heavy outer garments the year 'round, made regular use of sedatives and tranquilizers, and constantly consulted various doctors about a diverse assortment of symptoms, some real and others imagined.

These same mannerisms, however, were what was largely responsible for bringing Gould to the attention of the broader public, for Columbia's publicists used them to entice journalists into writing feature stories about him. Such stories led audiences to expect strange behavior from the pianist when he appeared in concert, and his neurotic temperament became as central to his media image as Cliburn's "all-American" persona was to his.

Paradoxically, Gould's bizarre mannerisms worked to conceal the agonizing discomfort that he experienced whenever he played in public. As I have already noted, he canceled concerts often, and nine years after his American debut he withdrew altogether from public performance, convinced that he could make a living solely by making records and playing on radio and TV. His decision provided still more grist for the media mill, and by the early 70's the pianist had acquired a cult-like following of admirers, especially in his native Canada, where he was virtually the only resident classical musician to have a major career.

An intellectual manqué who (in the words again of B. H. Haggin) preferred "talking nonsense on anything anywhere to playing the piano marvelously in the concert hall," Gould published numerous articles in which he constructed an elaborate skein of philosophical rationalizations for what essentially amounted to a paralyzing case of stage fright. He insisted that performing before audiences forced him to distort the music in order to "try to project it to that man up there in the top balcony." Actually, though, recordings made at his concerts suggest the opposite. "In a way," the pianist András Schiff has said, "they are infinitely more beautiful than his studio recordings, wonderful."*

THE SELF-IMPOSED isolation of Gould's later years heightened the stylistic eccentricities already evident in his recordings, the most common being the weirdly arbitrary extremes of tempo in which he regularly indulged. Some of these eccentricities can be explained by the narrowness of his musical tastes. As he himself said, he disliked most piano music composed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries:

> I don't think any of the early Romantic composers knew how to write for the piano. Oh, they knew how to use the pedal, and how to make dramatic effects, splashing notes in every direction, but there's very little real *composing* going on. The music of that era is full of empty theatrical gestures, full of exhibitionism, and it has a worldly, hedonistic quality that simply turns me off.

But once Gould had finished recording Bach's keyboard music for Columbia, he was faced with the problem of finding new works to commit to disk. Since his post-retirement income derived principally from album sales, he was under considerable pressure to perform a repertoire more accessible than the modern music that he loved. This seems to have been the main reason why he devoted so much time and energy to the piano sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven, most of which he played with brutal insensitivity.

Perhaps inevitably, Gould began to lose interest in the piano and its literature as he grew older. As a young man, he had briefly sought to express himself through composing, producing an uneven but interesting string quartet. In middle age, he considered taking up conducting, making a fascinating recording of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* in which he led a group of players drawn from the Toronto Symphony.† But the second career he envisioned never came to pass: in 1982 he died of a stroke, three weeks after recording the *Siegfried Idyll* and nine days after his fiftieth birthday.

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, perhaps the chief significance of Van Cliburn and Glenn Gould was that they were the first postwar classical instrumentalists to achieve international celebrity via the mass media. Already successful in their mid-twenties, they soon became full-fledged superstars whose names were known not only to musicians and music lovers but also to the general public. It is, of course, impossible to know whether they might have had more normal careers had they become famous later in their lives. But there can be little doubt that their existing psychological problems were exacerbated by the pressure of early acclaim driven by the imperatives of mass-media publicity.

Today, four decades after Cliburn appeared on the cover of *Time*, those imperatives have become more compelling than ever. The classical-recording industry, undermined by years of shrinking market share, is in the process of reinventing itself along media-driven lines. Young artists are being signed not

* *The Glenn Gould Legacy*, Vol. 2, contains a live performance of the Beethoven Second Concerto from Gould's 1957 tour of Russia; this performance, coupled with the Bach D-Minor Concerto taped at the same concert, is also available on Sony SMK 52686.

† Gould's String Quartet, Op. 1, is available in a recording by the Symphonia Quartet (Sony SMK 52679); his 1982 recording of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* can be heard on Sony SMK 52650.

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for the excellence of their musicianship but for having personalities regarded as "marketable" to young listeners. Whether or not this will yield the profits necessary to turn around an ailing industry—I personally doubt it—the broken careers of Cliburn and Gould powerfully suggest the price to be paid by such practices in terms of artistic health and seriousness.

In the meantime, however, the legacy of these two virtuosos also reminds us of the great potential that inhered in North American piano playing in the early postwar decades. It is true that Cliburn's near-complete lack of curiosity about the piano literature proved to be the weak link in his artistry, and his influence on the next generation of American concert pianists, many of whom drew from his career the understandable conclusion that the road to riches lay in playing Rachmaninoff and Tchaikowsky on the competition circuit, has been quite negative. Gould, by contrast, did far less to shape the tastes of younger artists, though the fact that so many pianists now program Bach as a matter of course, in spite of the increasingly powerful influence of the period-instrument movement, is due almost entirely to his example.

With all their flaws, however, and despite their tragic inability to cope with the insatiable demands of the publicity machine that made them famous, Cliburn and Gould remain indisputably major artists who in the long run will be remembered for one reason only: because they played so individually and so compellingly. And since both men made commercial recordings of virtually the whole of their working repertoires, it will remain possible for listeners of the future to hear at their best—and at their worst—these two outstanding figures of a gifted generation.

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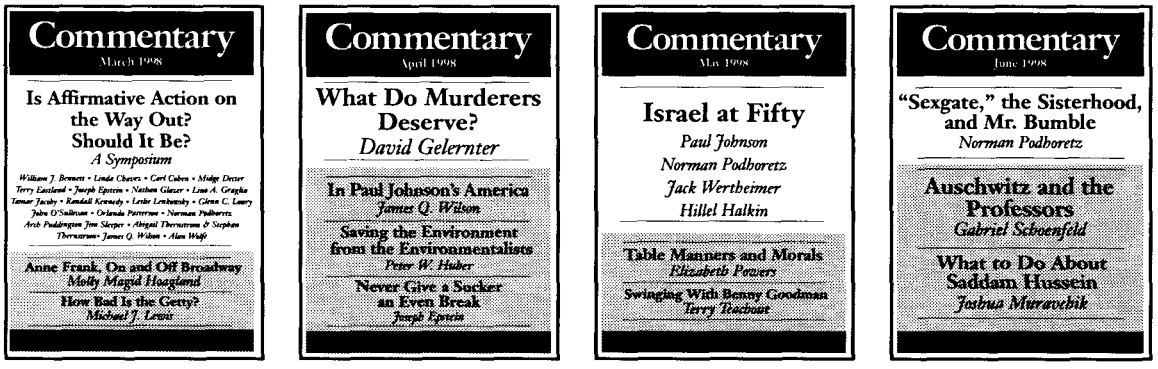

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Books in Review

For the Prosecution

A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency
by William Bundy
Hill and Wang. 647 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Gabriel Schoenfeld

RICHARD NIXON'S presidency ended in the self-immolation of Watergate. But before he resigned from office in disgrace, the 37th President spent six years guiding the ship of state through some of the cold war's most perilous waters. How well did he navigate?

Considering the precarious position of the United States at the moment Nixon was elected in 1968, several years into the agonizing war in Vietnam, even modest success would have been enough to establish his reputation as a foreign-policy savant. But together with his national-security adviser Henry Kissinger, Nixon achieved far more, extricating the U.S. from Vietnam, opening the door to Communist China, extinguishing major conflagrations on the Indian subcontinent and in the Middle East, and entering into a détente with a menacing nuclear-armed adversary. So, at least, many observers, including many of Nixon's political opponents at the time, have come to conclude in hindsight.

In *A Tangled Web*, William Bundy, the editor of *Foreign Affairs* from 1972 to 1984 and a former high-ranking foreign-policy official, dissents from this positive view. Having sifted through the innumerable biographies, memoirs, specialized monographs, and declassified diplomatic and CIA cable traffic, and not hesitating to offer praise where he thinks praise is due, he nevertheless frames a powerful indictment. By any standard, Bundy concludes, including the one Nixon set for himself, and notwithstanding the immense difficulties the U.S. faced, the administration's conduct cost America dearly in blood, treasure, and standing in the world.

Bundy is not, it should be made clear, a heedless dove. Rather, he more closely resembles a repentant hawk. Though he now judges America's role in Vietnam a disaster from beginning to end, he himself helped bring the disaster about, serving first in Dwight D. Eisenhower's CIA and then, when the going in Indochina began to get rough, moving on to become one of the "best and brightest" running the war from successive high-level perches in the Defense and State Departments under John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

On the other hand, Bundy is also not a reflexive Nixon-hater. He rates the President highly, at least in some respects, judging him "an extremely energetic and intelligent American of his generation" whose "exposure to the world and to foreign leaders stood near the top among the political figures of his time and among 20th-century candidates for the presidency." Yet Bundy also finds that, for all of Nixon's preparation, the same internal demons that caused his presidency to unravel—an instinctive mendacity, a predilection for subterfuge, a disdain for constitutional niceties—caused him to stumble in

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD *is senior editor of* COMMENTARY.

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foreign policy. And nowhere did he stumble harder than in Vietnam.

When Nixon assumed office in January 1969, American soldiers were dying in that land at the rate of nearly 200 a week. Though the conflict had already bitterly divided the United States and thoroughly demoralized Nixon's predecessor, Lyndon Johnson, Bundy reminds us of a fact today all but forgotten: in his first fifteen months in office, the newly-elected President enjoyed a remarkable degree of public support for his handling of the war. In particular, his policy of Vietnamization—the phased withdrawal of American troops—had broad appeal. But in carrying out that policy of disengagement, Nixon, from the very start, made a number of critical and characteristically Nixonian mistakes.

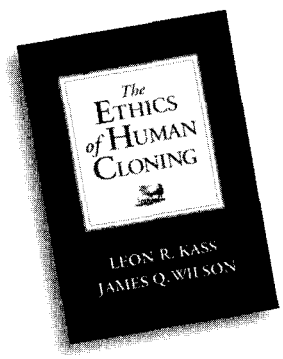
For one thing, out of misplaced personal loyalty to South Vietnam's leader Nguyen Van Thieu, a loyalty whose low political origins Bundy traces in close detail, the President never made a determined effort to get the lackluster South Vietnamese authorities to shape up, to demote incompetent officers, to promote proficient ones, and to eradicate widespread graft. This failure was decisive, in Bundy's view, for if South Vietnam could not defend itself without American soldiers, how could the U.S. ever disengage without precipitating Saigon's collapse?

For another thing, Nixon opted fairly quickly for a dramatic expansion of U.S. involvement, first by secretly beginning massive B-52 bombing raids on Cambodia in 1969 and then, in April 1970, by dispatching 32,000 U.S. troops into Cambodia. This expansion of the war was arguably not the contradiction in terms it might have seemed; rather, Bundy suggests, it could have been presented as an indispensable step to protect Saigon's western flank, paving the way for Vietnamization to proceed. But, in a speech Bundy rates as "the most extraordinary" in a generation (drafted by Patrick J. Buchanan), Nixon gave the Cambodia operation "a far more lurid and drastic coloring than it warranted," sparking widespread domestic protest, the shooting deaths of four demonstrators at Kent State, and a firestorm of media and congressional criticism.

Then, in the face of unrelenting pressure, Nixon did what in his speech he had said he would never do—he "caved" and cut the Cambodian action short, dismaying his hawkish supporters and the Pentagon, winning no points from doves, and showing weakness all around. In the event, Bundy asserts, the military gains secured by the truncated Cambodia incursion turned out to be "minimal," and were achieved at the cost of alienating "critical sectors of public and congressional opinion beyond recovery."

Bereft of political support for his policies, Nixon next chose to wrap key decisions in secrecy and outright lies as the U.S. role in the war dragged on for another three years. Though Nixon and Kissinger would later blame their inability to hold fast in South Vietnam on the erosion of authority caused by Watergate, Bundy contends that Nixon's credibility had been destroyed long before the scandal sapped the powers of his presidency. With even longtime congressional stalwarts of U.S. engagement in Indochina galvanized into revolt, Saigon's fate was inescapably sealed.

The end-game was swift in its completion. The Paris Accords of 1973, as Bundy and others before him have shown, constituted not a genuine peace agreement but a face-saving measure allowing the administration to secure a "decent interval" between American exit and South Vietnamese collapse. The South Vietnamese would be "lucky [if] they can hold out for a



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year and a half," Kissinger predicted in an unguarded moment, and so it came to be. Bundy's grim conclusion is that all Nixon achieved in Vietnam was to prolong U.S. involvement in the war, greatly increasing the numbers of Americans, Vietnamese, and Cambodians who lost their lives while reaping only national humiliation and ignominious defeat.

IS THIS critique on target?

Bundy puts forth a very strong case that Nixon handled the domestic political side of the war terribly, in effect amputating his own legs by antagonizing public and congressional opinion with secrets that never remained secret for long and unnecessary deceptions that were unraveled with speed and regularity. Even so, however, things are not quite so simple.

Already under Lyndon Johnson, the dying being done by American boys in Vietnam had begun to tear the country's political life asunder—indeed, to break Johnson's presidency itself. The orderly American retreat that was the essence of Nixon's policy, insofar as it required the initial application of tremendous force, would inevitably entail even more dying. And with soldiers falling in open view of the television cameras, and the roar of combat amplified by the antiwar campaign of a press and an intellectual class that had always despised Nixon, the political consequences were bound to be both treacherous and incalculable.

Nor was the pressure coming only from the media or from students calling for Communist victory. It was also coming from policymakers in and freshly out of government—colleagues of Bundy's—some of whom, having shipped American soldiers off to an unwinnable war, began to denounce Richard Nixon as he was searching for a way to bring them home. Though Bundy points a finger of blame at liberals who sought in dishonest ways to make political hay from Nixon's troubles, there is something unseemly in the lack of sympathy—the lack, really, of historical imagination—with which this former draftsman of our Vietnam policy judges the man who was struggling to clean up the terrible consequences of his predecessors' decisions while preserving a modicum of national honor.

NOR IS this all that is wrong with *A Tangled Web*. There are serious problems with its assessment of Nixon's diplomatic and military strategy itself, both in Vietnam and in the larger contest in which Vietnam formed a pivotal theater.

Bundy argues, for instance, that Nixon, a "true believer," was hobbled by "a predominantly ideological view of Communist nations and movements." This led him to disregard the way in which their behavior was shaped not by Marxism-Leninism but by nationalism. Mistakenly concluding that the North Vietnamese and the Khmer Rouge were nothing more than marionettes of Moscow and Beijing, the Nixon administration unnecessarily jeopardized the chance to improve relations with the two Communist giants in an effort to force them to do what could not be done, i.e., rein in their clients.

This notion that the Communists of Indochina were really closet nationalists, a notion recited to incantatory effect by many liberal critics of the war, happens to be false in itself, as we know from the kinds of totalitarian regimes they set up once they took power. But it is also a red herring. As the evidence compiled by Bundy's own narrative shows, both Moscow and Beijing enjoyed enormous leverage over the Vietnamese and the Cambodian insurgents, not by virtue of their status as ideological patrons but simply through their position as providers of arms.

Not that the USSR or China ever chose to exercise that influence. Instead, both countries, to bleed the United States and to stay abreast in their own bitter rivalry, simply kept the military-supply spigot fully open. But the point is that, far from being the unlettered anti-Communist that Bundy suggests, Nixon had excellent reasons to hold the USSR and China accountable for the bloodshed, even if he never succeeded in getting either to restrain the dogs of war.

Bundy's error here, it must be stressed, does not simply consist in wrongly emphasizing the nationalism of the North Vietnamese or the Khmer Rouge. Rather, his treatment of this core ideological issue reflects what is perhaps the least convincing and—in an analyst of his caliber—the most disappointing aspect of *A Tangled Web*: its softheaded treatment of détente with the USSR.

Bundy's fundamental thesis about Soviet-American relations is as follows. If Nixon's national-security team had been better and had made more use of the professionals in the Departments of State and Defense and less use of the grandstanding and power-grabbing Henry Kissinger, and if Nixon himself had been less flawed and more resolute, a genuine thaw might have been achieved in relations with the USSR. This in turn would have saved the U.S. and the world from the frightful dangers and stupendous military costs of the last years of the cold war.

Bundy's elaboration of this thesis is hardly devoid of value. With the same meticulous care he devotes to every other aspect of Nixon's foreign policy, he traces the ups and downs of détente, producing an authoritative account of who said what to whom, to what effect, and why. And he once again succeeds in showing that Nixon and Kissinger made mistakes of considerable consequence, bungling opportunities to channel the arms race in ways favorable to the United States and fumbling the ball in economic relations.

But while Bundy documents a

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great deal of sheer sloppiness—whether more or less than could be documented in other presidential administrations is a question apart—the evidence he adduces to show that the Kremlin was serious about a genuine thaw is mixed to say the least. He makes far too much of what he describes as a shift in orientation undertaken by Moscow in 1971, writing without any sustainable foundation that "Soviet policy thereafter reflected a wide-ranging 'Peace Program' reaching into every facet of Soviet foreign and domestic policy." Much more on the mark is his very different observation elsewhere that "there is little reason to believe that [Soviet archives] will show Soviet policy in a more pacific light than it was perceived at the time"—which is to say, not a very pacific light at all.

Bundy's confusion about Soviet behavior is compounded by a refusal to reflect on the way in which the cold war, a decade and a half after Nixon left office, actually came to an end—a subject hardly without relevance for an understanding of Nixon's efforts to forge a rapprochement with the USSR. For the Soviet Union was pushed onto the path of self-destruction in the 1980's not by an American policy of friendship and embrace like the one Nixon here stands accused of having pursued too half-heartedly, but rather by a posture—adopted by Ronald Reagan in the face of relentless fear-mongering and scorn—of unbridled competition in the ideological, economic, and military spheres. In counterpoint to Bundy's claim of what the world would have been spared by a more aggressive pursuit of détente, a better question is what it might have been spared—one thinks of such traumas as martial law in Poland and the invasion of Afghanistan—had Nixon opted to employ Reagan's bold confrontational strategy, or at least elements of it, a decade earlier.

The answer, of course, is not obvious: the shape of things changed considerably between the time Nixon stepped down and Reagan came to office. Still, Bundy, who blithely appears to assume that détente was an absolute and unquestionable good, declines to explore the territory at all, berating for their "zealot tendencies" those (like Senator Henry Jackson) who pushed at the time for a harder line and who, in raising the flag of human rights, prematurely (as it were) challenged the Soviet Communist party's right to rule. Though he concludes *A Tangled Web* with a chapter entitled "What Came After," Bundy fails to draw any lessons from, to come to terms with, or even to discuss the implications of what did in fact come after: namely, the collapse of the USSR.

This is a serious defect in a book with its share of other serious defects. Yet it would be wrong to conclude without also noting that *A Tangled Web* is a thoroughly engrossing work, written in a reasoned voice and, despite its defects, full of insight into the complexities of Richard Nixon's statecraft. Even its errors, and I have by no means enumerated all of them, have much to teach.

Chosenness & All That

Jews: The Essence and Character of a People
by Arthur Hertzberg and Aron Hirt-Manheimer
Harper San Francisco. 304 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
David Singer

While building his career as a pulpit rabbi and a figure in the Jewish establishment—he has served at various times as president of the American Jewish Congress and as a high official of various

David Singer *is editor of the* American Jewish Year Book.

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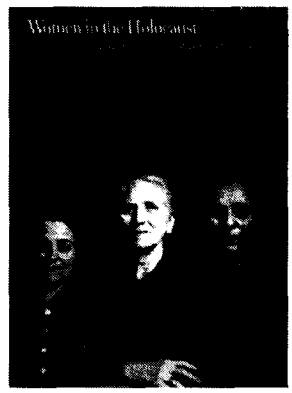

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Zionist bodies—Arthur Hertzberg has always aspired to the role of intellectual gadfly and critic. The author or editor of a number of well-regarded historical works, most especially *The Zionist Idea* (1959), he is perhaps better-known these days for his polemical essays in places like the *New York Times Magazine* and the *New York Review of Books*, where he takes a self-consciously "prophetic"—i.e., negative, bordering on vituperative—stance toward Jewish public life in both America and, especially, Israel under the Likud government.

Hertzberg's new book, *Jews: The Essence and Character of a People*, combines the genres of history and polemics. Unfortunately, it also breaks down in incoherence, which makes it a particularly difficult work to summarize. An initial theme is sounded in the preface, where Hertzberg announces that, as one who is himself in touch with the "authentic mainstream of Jewish experience," he is particularly well-placed to bring that mainstream to the fore. Toward that end, he informs us, he means to give voice in this book to "what I learned in my father and mother's home, and during those nights when I sat at a desk" as a student in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the rabbinical institution of Conservative Judaism.*

As for why the "authentic mainstream" needs to be recalled at just this moment, Hertzberg, striking his prophetic pose, says that he is on a rescue mission; he aims to save Judaism from both the "raucous voices on the religious Right who insist that only those who belong to their brand of religion are the true Jews, and . . . those on the Left who assert that being Jewish requires no learning and no obligations because the past is irrelevant to the new age." Fair enough. But what, as against these distortions, *is* the "authentic mainstream of Jewish experience"?

What Hertzberg claims to have learned in his parents' home and as a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary is a tolerant approach to other Jews and an openness to diverse Jewish perspectives. His father and mother, he writes, were strictly Orthodox—"*rav* and *rebbetzen* of the hasidic community in Baltimore"—yet "'everybody' came to our home." At the Seminary, which he found "exhilarating and full of surprises," he encountered Jews of every stripe who nevertheless treated each other with mutual respect as members of a shared "community of Jewish learning."

But rather than illustrating this allegedly "mainstream" model in the chapters that follow, Hertzberg drops the theme of tolerance almost as soon as he has raised it. In its place, he introduces another subject altogether: "the character of the Jews." By "character," which he uses in an old-fashioned sense, Hertzberg means "the Jewish nature," something that he insists has remained constant—"lasting," "continuing," and "definable" are a few of his adjectives—over time:

> The essential Jewish character . . . was already present and formed in the person of Abraham. It was reinforced for many centuries by Jews who were willing to bear the indignities of exile or even accept martyrdom rather than give up their faith in the one God. We view the Jewish character as an ancient river surging down into a delta—the delta being the modern age—in which it diverges into numerous streams. . . . It is the river that makes the delta, and its momentum has sustained the Jewish people to this day.

Whether any significant relationship exists between the supposed character of the Jews and an open and tolerant outlook, Hertzberg does not say. Nor, it turns out, is he all that taken by the "character" thesis, either, for after three chapters he abruptly abandons it as well, proceeding over the rest of the book to offer a summary history of the Jews through the centuries. As a pocket guide, this survey has its undeniable attractions, though it never even begins to deliver on its author's now twice-promised agenda.

IN ANY event, the main interest of *Jews* lies in the three chapters on character, which are indeed provocative and original, and very much in keeping with the self-image of an author who openly prides himself on having written a "scandalous" book. Let us now turn to them.

According to Hertzberg, the Jewish character has historically found expression under three key rubrics whose "interplay" yields the "essential Jew," a type recognizable not only to Jews themselves but to anti-Semites as well. The first element of the triad is chosenness, a concept that for Hertzberg goes far beyond the biblical notion of a "kingdom of priests and holy nation." Rather, the term evokes a conception of Jews as "aristocrats of the spirit" who have ever operated in the belief that what they do is of "transcendent significance to the whole of the human enterprise."

In Hertzberg's view, this "sense of moral mission" is a virtual genetic tic among Jews—so much so, indeed, that it manifests itself even among those who have become totally removed from Jewish life:

> The most intricate permutation of the Jewish chosenness doctrine was fashioned by nonbelieving Jewish intellectuals who joined the ranks of the great revolutionary movements of Central and Eastern Europe. These men and women demonstrated a special passion for remaking the world, and they were willing to

* Perhaps this is the place to note that *Jews*, though written with the "help and partnership" of Aron Hirt-Manheimer, the editor of *Reform Judaism*, is clearly Hertzberg's book. As Hirt-Manheimer writes in his own preface: "Hertzberg and I agreed that his viewpoint and scholarship would drive the arguments. . . . In fact, he dictated almost the entire first draft."

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accept martyrdom as the price of realizing the promise of a better life for all.

Next on Hertzberg's list is factiousness—i.e., the propensity of Jews to quarrel among themselves. Anti-Semites, of course, assume that Jews always act as one. But the sad truth, Hertzberg maintains, is otherwise. "By their very nature," Jews are "a people of critics," and their "terrible factionalism" throughout history has been "very serious and often very tragic."

"Outsider," the third of Hertzberg's rubrics, denotes the "otherness" of Jews in Western civilization, the fact that they have been "persistent dissenters in every society in which they have lived." In this adversarial strain Hertzberg locates the true source of anti-Semitism—"the fierce and often murderous anger of majorities against a people whose very existence keeps calling their verities into question." Like chosenness, the outsider category applies both to Jews who "cling to their own faith and their own values" and to "Jewish unbelievers, such as Franz Kafka . . . or Sigmund Freud [who] challenged the seemingly self-evident beliefs and values of conventional society."

What is one to make of all this? Perhaps the first thing to be said is that the notion of a fixed Jewish character, on permanent display over some 4,000 years of history, is a monument to ahistoricism. Without the slightest sensitivity to context, Hertzberg manages to treat as a singular experience the staggeringly different histories of Jews in ancient Canaan, 9th-century Yemen, 14th-century Italy, 18th-century Russia, and 20th-century America. Even if one grants the persistence of certain traits among Jews, which seems reasonable enough, the result in Hertzberg's rendition is a cartoon version of reality.

A greater problem is that the triad Hertzberg focuses on is not a particularly deep or useful guide to the Jewish "character." Divisiveness, for instance, has certainly been common among Jews, but far more consequential over the long term has been its opposite—namely, a shared sense of responsibility. In fact, Hertzberg acknowledges as much at one point—"the overwhelming Jewish experience through history," he writes, "has been that Jews have accepted responsibility for their people"—but then inexplicably denies this trait a place in the magic circle of Jewish characteristics. No doubt, as compared with factiousness, it is much too tame and unsexy a disposition for a "scandalous" work.

And "outsider"? For much of their history, Jews have indeed been cast in that role—by outsiders (i.e., non-Jews). Precisely for that reason, however, the category tells us nothing about the self-image of Jews. The truth is that, prior to the modern period, Jews took it as a given that they were the ultimate *insiders*—God's insiders—around whom the history of the nations revolved. This is sound biblical doctrine, and no experience of exile, however harsh, could sway Jews from believing in its verity.

Indeed, only by understanding Jews as insiders can we begin to apprehend the function of chosenness in the Jewish mentality. Hertzberg may well be correct that this doctrine conferred upon Jews a certain aristocracy of the spirit. (It also carried the potential of a decidedly unpleasant ethnocentrism.) But it is another thing entirely to apply this same idea uncritically and unqualifiedly to the participation of alienated modern Jews in the revolutionary Left. "They had joined the vanguard of the new elite," Hertzberg writes of Jewish radicals, "'suffering servants' of the revolution, to perform the task that prophets and rabbis had set for humanity: to regulate the moral chaos of society by creating a just order." That a rabbi and historian could write these words in full consciousness of the murderous regimes that these "suffering servants" helped to establish in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, and without a word of moral judgment, is nothing short of breathtaking.

Worse, many of these same disciples of "prophets and rabbis," once in power, worked overtime to destroy every vestige of Jewish life in their respective societies. The Bolshevik Leon Trotsky knew exactly what he was up to when (as Hertzberg duly reports) he refused to bury his father in a Jewish cemetery. If this is an example of what Jewish chosenness means in the modern world, one can only pray that the Jews will be spared any further manifestations of it.

That so obviously gifted a writer as Arthur Hertzberg should have descended to this level is a pity. But such are the pitfalls of equating the

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prophetic vocation with mere "scandalousness," and of setting up on that slim basis to lecture the Jewish people on its duties and failings. To be a prophet in the biblical sense is to see clearly. If *Jews: The Essence and Character of a People* demonstrates one thing, it is how rare that quality remains today, perhaps especially in those claiming the mantle of prophetic insight.

A Tale of Three Cities

Someone Else's House: America's Unfinished Struggle for Integration
by Tamar Jacoby
Free Press. 614 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Daniel Casse

FROM ITS inception in the early postwar era, the American civil-rights movement took as its goal a fully integrated, color-blind society: a society in which race would no longer be either a barrier or a preference. This, indeed, was the declared purpose of the great Civil Rights Act of 1964, which boldly prohibited discrimination "on the grounds of race, color, religion, or national origin." Yet as is well known, it was only a matter of a few short years before the stated goals of the 1964 Act were completely inverted, and both federal and local policy-makers turned explicitly to a *reliance* on race and color in housing, employment, education, and city contracting. The results—busing, minority set-asides, racial preferences in university admissions, employment quotas, and the like—are by now an old, sad story.

Indeed, as Tamar Jacoby notes in *Someone Else's House*, the remarkable thing about integration is how short-lived it was as a goal not only for government but among civil-rights activists as well. Even as early as 1963, she writes, the year of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the historic March on Washington, "the basic political obstacles to integration were already evident." Within a year after passage of the Civil Rights Act, black nationalists were clearly intent on "the dethroning of integration as the movement's goal," and within a few more years the movement had swung definitively behind a separatist agenda.

How did a cause—integration—that had won so much praise, enjoyed so much popular support, and become the *de-jure* policy of the federal government, fail so completely? In answering that question, Jacoby has instructively chosen a local focus. She follows the activities of four mayors, one white and three black, whose tenures in office were consumed by racial matters: John Lindsay in New York City during the 1960's; Coleman Young in Detroit in the 70's; and Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young in Atlanta during the 70's and 80's. Although there were obvious differences among the four in style and approach, each consciously put race at the forefront of virtually every aspect of municipal policy. By so doing, they collectively helped to ensure that integration would become a more distant and irrelevant goal.

In New York, the Lindsay administration, acting in the name of "empowerment," "decentralization," and "community control," established mini-city halls in black neighborhoods and gave local black leaders greater authority over the running of anti-poverty programs and other social services. Then as now there was little evidence that such strategies were effective at anything but creating new forms of patronage. Within a year after its much-touted launch, Lindsay's power-sharing program was dead. In its place, a city fearful of rising racial tensions and in thrall to an ethos of reparations simply started to give away cash. By 1967, Jacoby writes, Lindsay's task force on urban problems "had every streetcorner speaker in Harlem on its payroll."

Bribery and appeasement seemed the preferred tactic in Detroit as well. There, in the wake of 1967 riots, a committee formed by the city's wealthiest business leaders had tried to pacify angry black youths by disbursing nearly $10 million to local paramilitary groups and ghetto toughs in what Jacoby describes as "thinly disguised riot insurance."

No amount of money, however, could calm the racial pot that was set aboiling by Coleman Young in the 1970's. When the city's stalled economy forced extensive budget cuts, Young's solution was to dismantle the police department; in the process, he tried to fire 800 white officers and not a single black. At the same time, a local judge named George W. Crockett, Jr. was routinely releasing black arrestees and refusing to sentence convicted black criminals. Thus encouraged, the mob elements in Detroit's ghetto went on a rampage of looting and urban terror, prompting a new wave of propitiation by the city's business leaders. And so the cycle continued until the inner city was all but destroyed.

COMPARED WITH New York and Detroit, Atlanta—the "city too busy to hate," as it likes to call itself—appears to offer a racial success story. In Jacoby's telling, however, its success has been a clouded one. Mayor Maynard Jackson knew how to make peace with the white business leaders who had run Atlanta for decades, but he also knew how and when to issue racial ultimatums. Thus, when plans were drawn up for the city's Hartsfield airport, Jackson successfully stalled the $500-million project for over a year until every white-owned construction company that had a building contract agreed to operate jointly with a minority-

DANIEL CASSE *is a senior director of the White House Writers Group, a public-policy communications firm.*

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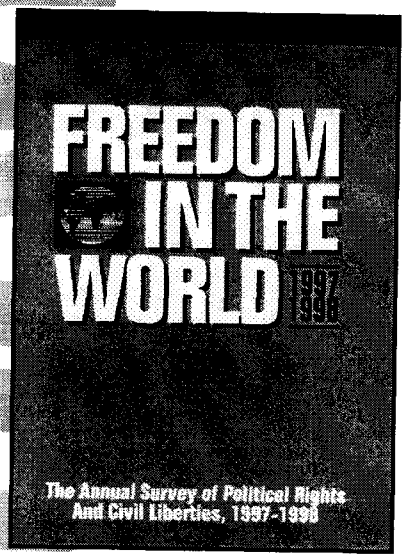

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owned firm—whether or not that firm had any relevant experience. Thus was a construction bonanza turned into an opportunity to enforce a racial spoils system.

According to Jacoby, very few minority businesses benefited permanently from Atlanta's policy of coerced "cooperation." Within seven years after the airport was completed, half of the minority firms in the program found they could not make it on their own. By then, however, racial set-asides had become the hallmark of doing business in Atlanta, from banking to cable television, and so they remained under Jackson's successor, Andrew Young.

A former Congressman and UN ambassador, Young was more adept than Jackson at invoking the old rhetoric of integration. But he, too, proved perfectly willing to play the race game whenever it suited him, including during his runoff election against a white state legislator. In office, despite many fine speeches on racial harmony, Young did nothing to reverse the city's entrenched system of racial quotas and preferences. The Jackson-Young legacy continues today: during the Olympic games two years ago, even street-vendor licenses in Atlanta were distributed on the basis of race.

JACOBY IS very effective at showing how race-conscious policies, promoted by government and the black civil-rights establishment alike, have done more to keep blacks and whites apart in America's cities than to bring them together. In assessing responsibility for this state of affairs, she calls attention not only to the usual culprits but to a weakness, as she sees it, of the early integrationists. Apart from their manifest good will, she writes, the fathers of the civil-rights movement never thought through a positive strategy for bringing poor blacks into the American mainstream, and they thus inadvertently left the field open to radicals and opportunists.

To Jacoby, this is what is needed today: an integrationist strategy, and a positive program for carrying it out. Unfortunately, however, she is as short on solutions as were her intellectual predecessors. Although she writes eloquently of the need to "acculturate" impoverished inner-city blacks, all she can offer are vague, shopworn remedies: better prenatal care, job training, and transition programs out of welfare.

But perhaps that is just the point, and perhaps the old integrationists were right all along. In 1963, integration meant breaking down the legal and social barriers that were literally preventing blacks from participating in many aspects of American life. Today, that goal has been largely achieved. As Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom have demonstrated conclusively in *America in Black and White*, white attitudes have shifted dramatically; formal segregation does not exist in any legal sense; and even the cities that were once cauldrons of unrest seem comparatively calm. True, there are vestiges of racial thinking in America, but the most salient one is, ironically, government-enforced preferences, and there is even a healthy and growing backlash against *that*.

In New York City, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani does not seem to have a policy on race, or on integration. "One city, one standard" is his response to questions on racial issues, and he has successfully dismantled the corrupt local boards that were established during the rush to community empowerment in the 60's. Jacoby commends Giuliani's approach, but still wishes something more could be done to promote integration. What she does not seem to recognize is that the dismantling of the race-based policies established over the past three decades is, in and of itself, an ambitious step toward the creation of a color-blind society. Pursuing this agenda will do far more to erode the barriers between blacks and whites than any quixotic search for an "integrationist" solution.

Due Process

We the People: Transformations
by Bruce Ackerman
Harvard. 515 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
Adam Wolfson

ONE GREAT divide in our politics pits conservatives who believe a judge should be guided by the views of those who designed and ratified the Constitution against liberals who believe a judge should construe the clauses of the "living" Constitution in response to the needs of our own day. While the former plumb the historical record in search of original meanings, the latter engage in a species of open-ended moral philosophizing. Seldom do the twain meet.

For Bruce Ackerman, a professor of law and political science at Yale, the conservatives have been looking for the Constitution in all the wrong places. As a self-described "liberal committed to social justice," he means to show that delving into history produces something other than an arid catalogue of original intentions. Rather, in *We the People: Transformations*, the second volume of a projected three-volume study, he discovers in the American past a long and respectable tradition by means of which Americans have simply *remade* the Constitution as circumstances have demanded, and in defiance of the formal procedures for doing so. This inquiry into the key historical events that have shaped our fundamental law, Ackerman writes, should remind us anew of the "efficacy of popular sovereignty."

THE BOOK is divided into three parts, each devoted to a particular moment. The first is the Founding. As Ackerman shows, the Constitu-

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tion itself arose not from a state of nature but as a successor to the Articles of Confederation, the duly ratified regime under which Americans lived for most of the 1780's. For Federalists like James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, the Confederation posed a great obstacle to constitutional reform—so they simply circumvented its onerous rules for amendment. At the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, they created a new Constitution from scratch, with its own procedures for ratification. So welcome was the prospect of a vigorous national government that most Americans willingly accepted these extra-constitutional methods.

Ackerman points to a similar pattern during Reconstruction. In the wake of the Civil War, Republicans in Congress wanted to ensure that the Southern states would reenter a union firmly committed to the principle of racial equality. The only way to do this was by altering the Constitution. Hence, they made ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment a condition of readmittance, a position overwhelmingly supported in the election of 1866. Such a *quid pro quo* clearly violated the deliberative process that the Constitution contemplates for amendment: the Southern states were in effect coerced into giving their consent.

Ackerman's final case is the New Deal, a vast expansion of federal power that, like the Founding and Reconstruction, came about, he claims, through open disregard of constitutional niceties. Agreeing with H.L. Mencken, who predicted that President Roosevelt would "waste no time (and run no risk) trying to change [the Constitution] by the orderly process of amendment," Ackerman argues that FDR guided the nation through a long process of "higher lawmaking," taking the initiative by actively promoting his programs, gaining congressional and popular support for them in the course of several election cycles, and, finally, winning the acceptance of an initially hostile Supreme Court in the famous "switch in time" of 1937. Though the New Deal was not enshrined in the Constitution's text, it is, Ackerman maintains, now part of the Constitution nonetheless.

For Ackerman, these three monumental changes stand as an indictment of the "original intent" of Article V of the Constitution itself, where the formal process of amendment—with its complex requirements for the joint action of Congress, various sorts of conventions, and the state legislatures—is described in great detail. If the Constitution's cumbersome mechanism for amendment was unnecessary for the Founding, Reconstruction, and the New Deal, he reasons, it cannot be worth keeping.

With what would he replace it? Ackerman's preference is for the distinctive political process that he discerns deep within all three of his cases. No simple matter itself, this informal route to amendment involves, by his lights, no fewer than five discrete stages: "signaling," in which the party of constitutional transformation indicates by some means that a revolutionary moment is afoot; "proposing," in which it unveils the new regime; "triggering," whereby a new method of popular consent is invented; "ratification," the people's endorsement of the proposed changes; and finally, "consolidation," the acceptance of the new order across the political spectrum. Here, rather than in Article V, Ackerman argues, is the actual source of much of our Constitution's legitimacy.

Indeed, in his final chapter, Ackerman proposes that this process be formalized by amending the Constitution to accommodate it. Article V would be supplanted by what he calls his "Popular Sovereignty Initiative." Under its provisions, a President would be authorized in his second term to propose amendments, which would take effect if approved first by the Congress and then by the people themselves in the course of the next two presidential elections. Thus modified, Ackerman claims, the Constitution would itself finally acknowledge what has long been the case: that its meaning is determined not by its own legalistic forms but by the considered views of the sovereign people.

We the People: Transformations is a welcome return to a sort of constitutional and political history that is no longer fashionable in the academy, where social history is now ascendant. It is, in addition, a lively and informative read. But whether Ackerman's account holds up is another question.

In the first place, it is distinctly odd to invoke the American founders against the very process of amendment that they themselves so solemnly established; Madison, for one, happily complied with the terms of Article V in shepherding through the Bill of Rights. As for Reconstruction, whatever its constitutional irregularities, there is no

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avoiding the fact that its sponsors felt the need to appeal to the formal requirements of Article V. That leaves us with the New Deal, which was indeed brought about without benefit of traditional amendment. But this raises problems of another sort.

Ackerman wishes us to see the New Deal as not just permitted under the Constitution but as somehow required by it. In his view, the "activist welfare state" has become a part of our fundamental law. This means, however, that as far as he is concerned the New Deal cannot be cut back, *even if* that is what the American people seem to want in the course of ordinary elections. In short, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Ackerman's goal is not so much a return to popular sovereignty in constitutional interpretation as the protection of certain sacred cows of modern liberalism.

Another such sacred cow is the right to abortion, as established by the Supreme Court in its controversial decision in *Roe* v. *Wade*. Here, Ackerman's argument cuts the other way, but is no less flawed. In his final chapter, he castigates the efforts of the Reagan and Bush administrations to overturn *Roe* v. *Wade* by appointing sympathetic Justices to the Court rather than by fighting the matter out politically. Having failed even to initiate the all-important five-stage process, he writes, they were not entitled to attempt so profound a change in our constitutional regime. Considering, however, that *Roe* v. *Wade* itself overturned democratically enacted laws in most of the states, and even now blocks many popular restrictions on abortion, Ackerman is on exceptionally thin ice in scolding those who "suppose that the judges can play a vanguard role when the people themselves are silent."

That Ackerman recognizes the implausibility of his claims, and the difficulties posed by his scheme for an effectively unwritten Constitution, is suggested by his wish to formalize the five-stage process that he claims to have recovered from our past. As he rightly observes, explicit, written rules of amendment give politicians, judges, and the people alike a definitive guide to what is truly a part of the fundamental law and what is not. But those explicit, written rules of amendment already exist. By them the integrity of the Constitution is preserved—and so is the constitutionally guaranteed right of the people to change it when they so choose, rather than when a law professor sees fit.

Damsels in Distress

Bitch: In Praise
of Difficult Women
by Elizabeth Wurtzel
Doubleday. 288pp. $23.95

Reviewed by
Margaret Schulman

ELIZABETH WURTZEL'S first book, *Prozac Nation*, published in 1994, generated considerable interest and earned for its author a certain notoriety. Wurtzel, a pretty girl then in her mid-twenties, wrote in a flamboyant yet oddly engaging way about the experience of growing up in New York between divorced and warring parents and undergoing a severe form of depression that began in childhood and lasted for more than a decade. In spite of these seemingly overwhelming problems, Wurtzel managed to excel in school, write prize-winning journalism, and spend two crazy, unsupervised years as an undergraduate at Harvard—before finally attempting suicide and finding proper care. She was one of the first persons to receive the newly-approved antidepressant drug, Prozac, which effectively, even miraculously, rescued her from her ordeal.

MARGARET SCHULMAN, *a new contributor, is a writer living in New York.*

Strikingly, although *Prozac Nation* received more than its share of media attention, including an article in *Vanity Fair* accompanied by a picture of the smirking author lying in a pool of prescription pills, the reviews of the book in liberal publications were uniformly hostile, in one case (*Newsweek*) being so gratuitously nasty as to amount to a kind of smear. All the critics made the same point: although Wurtzel claimed that her story was in some way symptomatic of the situation of young people in general, and especially of girls, in reality hers was nothing but (in the words of one of her critics) a "self-obsessed case study."

The charge was not altogether without merit. *Prozac Nation* took its place in a fairly recent genre of intimate, harrowing accounts of the mental plight of young women and had nothing of significance to add to the debate on Prozac other than to illustrate the fact that some people truly needed it. On one subject, however, Wurtzel did venture out of the self-enclosed memoir form. What all the negative reviews chose to ignore was her dramatization of the effects of divorce and the breakdown of the family on many members of her generation:

> Sometimes I think that I was forced to withdraw into depression because it was the only rightful protest I could throw in the face of a world that said it was all right for people to come and go as they please. . . . My father had a child that he didn't have too much trouble walking away from; it seems only natural that so many of us have pregnancies that we can abandon even more easily. After a while, meaning and implication detach themselves from everything. . . . Pretty soon, it seems unreasonable to be bothered or outraged by much of anything. . . . In a world where the core social unit—the family—is so dispensable, how much can anything else mean?

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Considering how insistent, even repetitious, Wurtzel was on this point—namely, the often disastrous consequences of sexual liberation for the children of the liberated—it is almost laughable how her reviewers insisted on ignoring it, and on painting her instead as nothing but a callow exhibitionist. (She is certainly that.) And now her second book has been greeted with a similarly dismissive response, on similar grounds and with a somewhat greater degree of justification.

THE FRONT cover of *Bitch* shows a supremely confident, topless Wurtzel raising a middle finger to the world. This gesture of bravado is fully in keeping with the flagrant displays of carelessness that characterize the prose within ("I want to be whom I am," "men with Indo-European accents," and the like). Where her first book, at least, showed signs of having been edited, and her persona, though verging on the obnoxious, was held in check by the demands of consecutive narration, this book is entirely a product of Wurtzel's decidedly nonlinear imagination. It is, moreover, so steeped in the themes and trivia of popular culture—she once served as a popular-music critic for the *New Yorker*, and is given to sentences like, "And so it is not surprising that [Madonna] is the leap between Patti and Chrissie and, eventually, Courtney and Liz"—as to give the impression of a guided tour through a moronic inferno.

The ostensible subject of *Bitch* is the seductive, disturbed, and dangerous woman—a female type with which Wurtzel has long been fascinated. One of the first representatives of the genre to capture her attention as a child was Bernadine Dohrn, a member of the Weathermen, the 60's underground movement; young Elizabeth idolized her because "for all her intellect she couldn't help her hypersexuality." And then there were the "sexually compelling Bible women" Wurtzel learned about in her Orthodox Jewish schooling: Bathsheba, Jael, Delilah. What she first admired in Delilah—"the ability to project lust and allure"—is what she would come to admire years later in female defendants on trial for sex crimes.

There follows a collection of campy and slightly off-kilter tributes to these and other female celebrities, including Amy Fisher, the teenager convicted of the attempted murder of her lover's wife; the poets Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath; the actress Margaux Hemingway; and the exhibitionist and Andy Warhol acolyte Edie Sedgwick, concluding with a meditation on the fate of Nicole Brown Simpson. What all these women supposedly have in common is that they acted at the promptings of their own outsize desires and paid the price, coming to inevitable bad ends in their encounter with the social forces arrayed against them.

In Wurtzel's view, those forces include, needless to say, masculine privilege, conventional morality, and the law. But, as in *Prozac Nation*, they also include feminism, which in Wurtzel's judgment is guilty at best of misinterpreting and at worst of condemning what these women represent, and so diminishing the full range of female prospects.

One thing they represent is, of course, unbridled sexuality, Wurtzel's earnest defense of which puts her in the company of other recent writers disappointed with the sexually repressive turn taken by at least one branch of the feminist movement. Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe, for example, have condemned the new feminist preoccupation with sexual harassment and date rape, expressing alarm over the fact that promiscuity is no longer the instrument of self-discovery that it was in the early days of the women's movement; to the contrary, many girls have ceased to look to sexual experimentation as a rite of passage to womanhood and, worse, are experimenting instead with things like prolonged virginity.* This disturbs Wurtzel as well:

> What good really have [the successes of feminism] done if we still get the feeling that we have to control our urges and suppress ourselves in the interest of courtship and love?

But that is hardly Wurtzel's only gripe against feminism. As a type, the bitch is more than a free sexual spirit; she is emotionally vulnerable in a way that feminism specifically deprecates and disallows. Thus, Amy Fisher, the fifteen-year-old who shot her lover's wife, was not only depressed but also, as Wurtzel construes her, a good deal more sensitive and interesting than her intended victim, the "troglodyte" Mary Jo Buttafuoco. Why, then, did feminists line up behind Mary Jo rather than Amy? Wurtzel, here reverting to a theme of *Prozac Nation*, suggests an answer:

> Amy Fisher was a grim . . . reminder of . . . so many girls who have gotten the worst of the promises of liberation—promiscuity, pornography, prostitution in the suburbs.

Finally, Wurtzel's catalogue of complaints against feminism includes another, quite novel and revealing, charge. Two of her bitch heroines are the poets Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, both of whom committed suicide. These two, she writes, "had the force and talent and beauty to turn their emotional disasters and hysteria into . . . art." But now feminism, by "politicizing [female] depression"—that is, by defining depression strictly as a function of the unequal power relations between men and women—has radically impoverished the possibilities of such feminine self-expression.

Once women are instructed to view their emotions—especially

*See Wendy Shalit, "Daughters of the (Sexual) Revolution," COMMENTARY, December 1997.

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those unique to them as women—in the light not of their nature but of their political situation, they cut themselves off, Wurtzel writes, from "artistic expression drawn from despair—which was the task of confessional poetry." She particularly bemoans this loss because nothing on her own cultural horizon—which seems confined, in the way of poetry, to girl bands and performance artists—offers the aesthetic satisfaction to be found in these writers.

It is easy to belittle the hidden assumptions here: that, on the one hand, the poetry of Plath and Sexton constitutes high art, and that, on the other hand, anyone in his right senses would look to popular culture as a medium of serious instruction and communication. But to the extent that Wurtzel's fascination with popular culture is not altogether mindless, it does in fact seem to be related to a desire for just such instruction and communication—that is, for a genuine education of the feelings.

Elizabeth Wurtzel is articulate enough about the disturbances of her life, and of the times in which she grew up, to allow one to conclude that she could not have been left at more of a loss for examples of how to behave, or of what kind of woman to be, than if she had come from Mars. In turning to popular culture for images of glamor and significance, she finds women who can also be, however absurdly or meretriciously, vehicles for the expression of emotion. In this they do indeed have a wholly feminine significance—and not just for her—that is nowhere to be found in the contemporary landscape, a landscape marked by the continuing failure of feminism to shape women in its image.

We mourn the death of

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1904-1998

master scholar of Jewish history,
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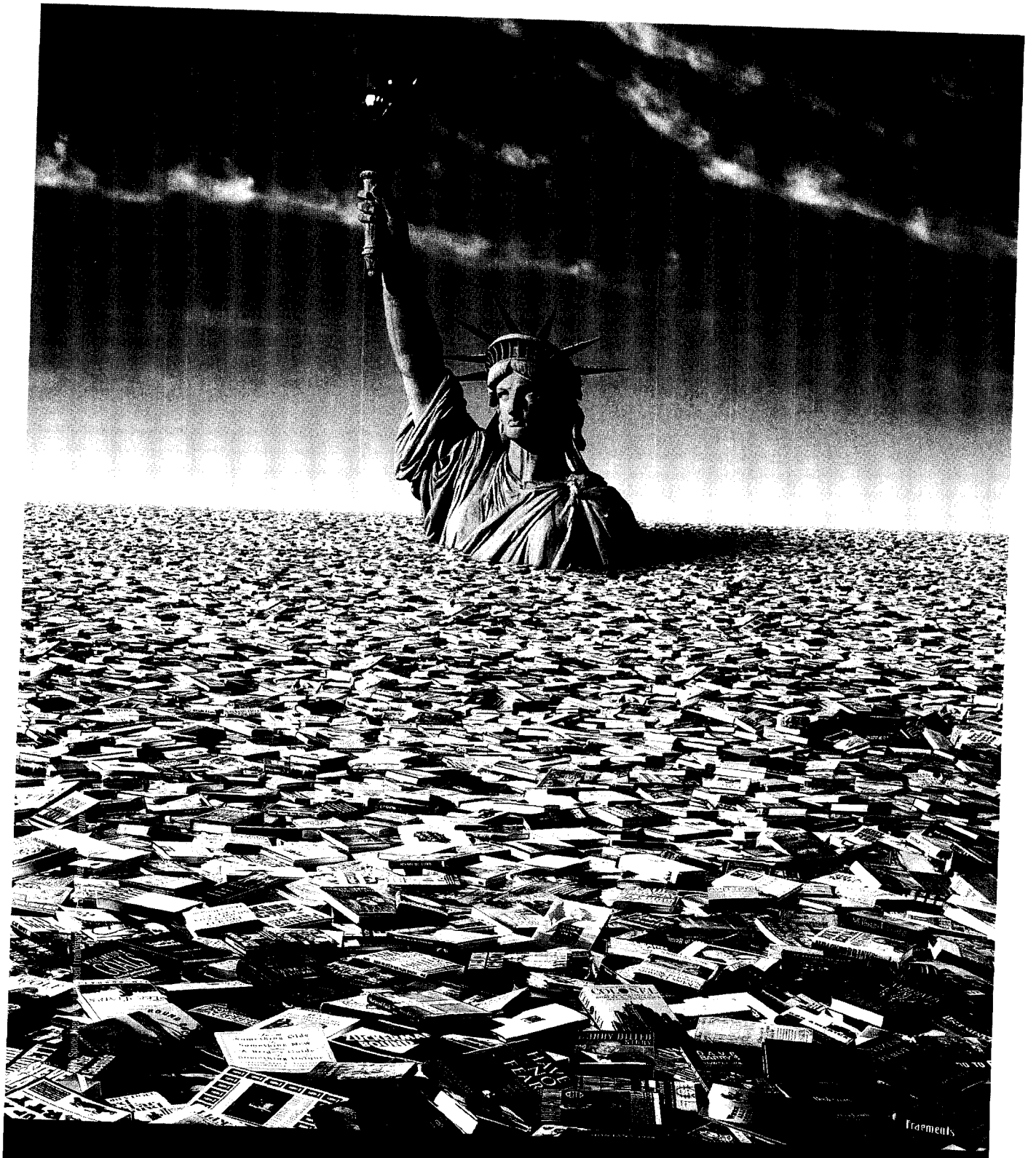

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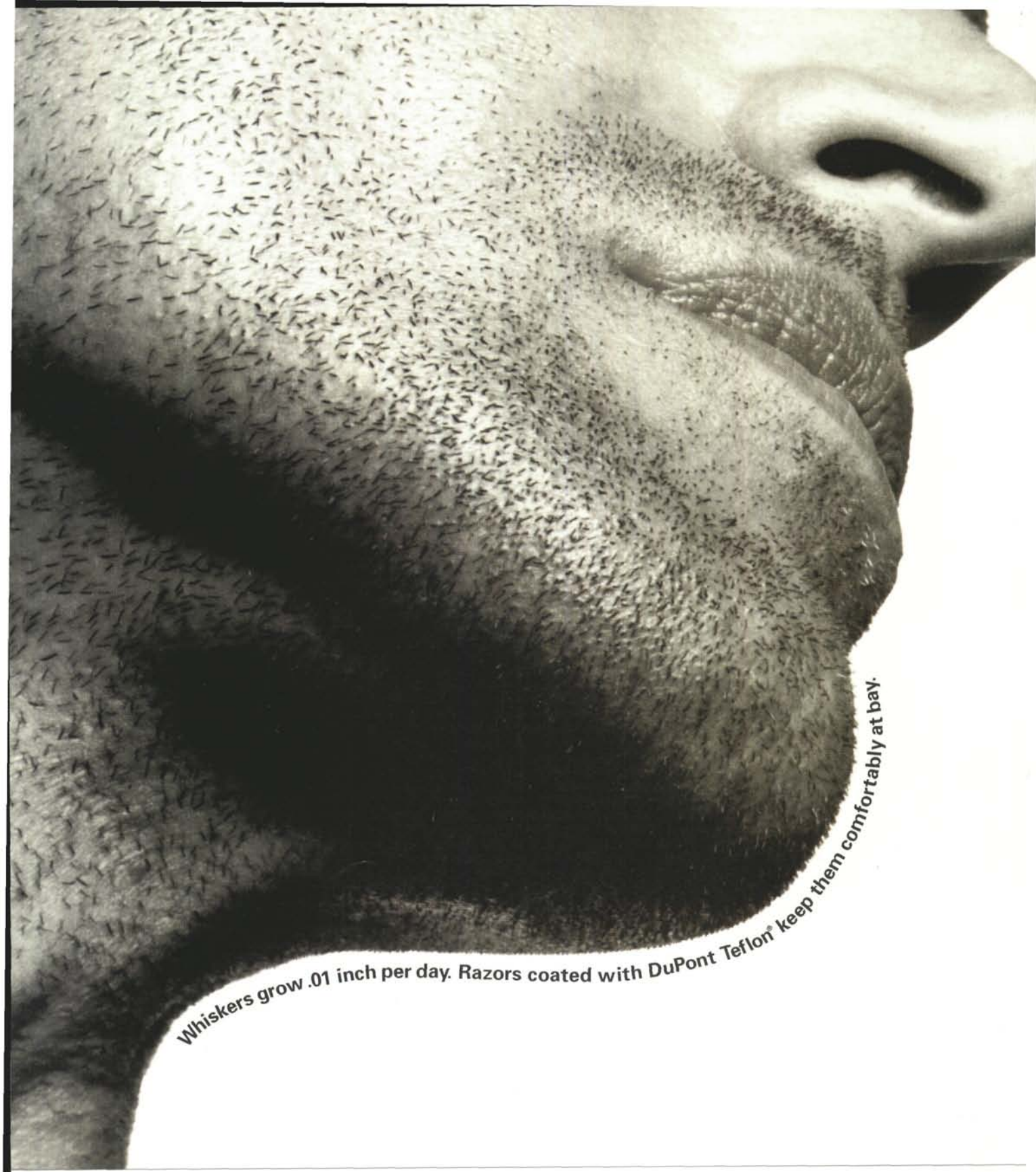

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